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SERMONS,

BY

THE REV. J. GRANT, M. A.

S. GOSNELL, Printer, Little Queen Street, London.

Surgis H. D. O.
SERMONS;

BY

THE REV. J. GRANT, M. A.

OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD;

FORMERLY MINISTER OF LATCHFORD, CHESHIRE;

AND

LATE CURATE OF THE PARISHES

OF

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM HENRY MAJENDIE,

LORD BISHOP OF BANGOR.

MY LORD,

I AM happy in being permitted to present this Volume of Discourses to that esteemed individual under whose eye my views of professional usefulness were first unfolded and encouraged. May I hope that your Lordship will receive it as a slight memorial of gratitude for the many marks of attention manifested in the Diocese of Chester towards

Your Lordship's

Most respectful and dutiful servant,

JOHNSON GRANT.

London, June 1812.



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P R E F A C E.

THREE reasons have induced me to add the following Discourses to the vast number of Sermons already before the public:—a hope of their being serviceable beyond the sphere where they were first delivered;—the solicitation of respectable friends;—and the view of enabling myself to complete the publication of the History of the English Church. They will, I am inclined to be confident, prove useful to pious persons, in the hours of solitary devotion; and to masters of families, who may deem them worthy of being read to their households on Sunday evenings.

As I cannot, however, divest myself entirely of concern, with respect to their reception in the world, where they will necessarily undergo an examination as compositions,—I must request the general reader (should any such

peruse them) to recollect, that they were written for mixed congregations.—When this is held in view, I need not much dread the ordeal:—for if it be considered, that, in accommodation to such an auditory, the language of an address should be sufficiently polished to chain the attention of the more refined, yet sufficiently simple to be intelligible to the illiterate;—and that in matter it should be distinguished by substance and solidity, without plunging into depths, or running into labyrinths, where the humblest understanding is incapable of following;—it will, I presume, be owned, that these Discourses, whatever may be their defects, could not be widely different from what they are, without ceasing to be adapted to their proper purpose.

I have felt myself pledged, by a particular circumstance, which cannot be publicly mentioned with strict propriety, to send forth these Sermons, exactly as they were delivered, in the method of direct address:—which I hope will apologize for the frequent interspersion of such short conciliatory phrases, as were

necessary to abate the appearance of imperativeness, attached to that mode of instruction.

All orthodox and useful preaching must, necessarily, consist, in great measure, of common places: for sacred instruction, drawing its matter from the Bible and the human breast, will rather impart recollections, than discoveries: and the chief art and only novelty in the composition of a sermon, will be the application of improvements in arrangement and in style to materials with which most well-educated and reflective minds are already familiarly acquainted.—The meats are precisely the same, as they were wont to be:—various combinations of “milk” for some, and of “stronger food” for others:—we only profess to alter the distribution of the courses, and the proportion of the ingredients;—while we add here and there a little garnishing, and a reasonable admixture of sweets or spiceries, to stimulate, without spoiling, the jaded appetite.

Where all have vied in befriending me, it will be almost invidious to particularize:—yet

I should reproach myself did I fail to express my warmest acknowledgments to the estimable Bishops of St. David's and Killala, for the very liberal assistance they have given to my volume. Whether, in the present instance, they have advanced a new claim to their general character, as patrons of struggling merit, and encouragers of whatever is good;—whether, in common with other friends, they have acted serviceably, towards the religious part of the community, I have not yet the means of ascertaining; for that man ventures on a hazardous experiment who presumes, that addresses, which have excited interest, and produced no inconsiderable impression when delivered from the pulpit,—will pass in print, with similar effects, under the cold eye of patient and severe criticism.

J. G.

London,
42, Edgeware Road,
June 28th, 1812.

ERRATUM.

In the note, p. 971, omit, "of Life."

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S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N I.

MOTIVES TO DUTY.

JOHN, CHAP. IV. VERSE 34.

*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me,
and to finish his work.*

SCRIPTURE represents the whole animate and inanimate creation, as made to accomplish the designs, and to promote the glory, of God. Accordingly, we behold all things around us obeying his will, and fulfilling the ends of their being. The sun and moon, and all the heavenly orbs, praise their Almighty Maker, by observing their appointed courses. The fire, the snow, the stormy wind, fulfil his sovereign word. Beasts and cattle, fish and feathered fowl, mountains and fruitful trees, all respectively and invariably accomplish the wise intentions of the Creator*.

But when we turn our eyes to MAN, what an exception do we discover to this general con-

* Psalm cxlvi.

formity unto the will of the universal Parent! How often do we observe this being, who boasts of his reason, at once assuming the sceptre over the lower creation, and degrading himself beneath it! How often do we behold him, by criminal negligence, how often by more criminal activity, thwarting the views of Heaven, deranging the laws of the universe, and becoming a fatal source of confusion among the harmonious works of God!

This want of conformity to the general obedience paid by created beings to the Almighty Governor, may be traced to that principle which exalts us above the rest of nature, our superiority in freedom of will. Man is, and was designed by the Almighty to be, a moral agent. The obedience required from HIM was appointed to proceed, not from blind instinct, or mechanical impulse, but from motives addressed to his reason and conscience;—motives, which, as a free agent, he may, nevertheless, resist. While required to love and to seek that which is good, he is possessed of all the power of following what is evil; that the nature of his conduct may be determined by a choice, an option, a voluntary preference.

He is, in a word, placed in a state of probation: and it is difficult to form any conception of

such a state, without some liberty of yielding obedience to proposed laws, or of acting in violation of them.—Hence the same tongue that should bless, may curse:—the same hand may wield the instrument of aggressive destruction, that ought to hold forth relief to a fellow-creature:—the feet may be swift in running to shed blood, which are formed to go on errands of mercy:—and the intellect, bestowed for the sacred purpose of ministering to truth, to utility, and to improvement, may be rendered subservient to artful devices; to the wiles of sophistry, and the plottings of depravity.

In that trial, to which the obedience of our great ancestor Adam was subjected, we behold a correct representation of our own probationary condition. A certain commandment was given to him in Paradise: life was promised to his observance of that commandment, and death denounced against transgression. Thus the love of life and the fear of death on the one hand, and the allurements of the forbidden fruit on the other, were the opposite considerations which acted on his intellect, and pleaded before his choice.—Transgression of every kind is our forbidden fruit. A variety of arguments for refraining from it are laid before us: and between these arguments, and the temptations from which they dissuade us, our free choice,

incited and aided, no doubt, but not forced, by divine grace, has to decide.

Circumstanced then as we are, having to work out our own salvation, by rightly using our reason, and by availing ourselves of the help so graciously tendered, it highly behoves us to review these arguments in favour of obedience to the divine laws, to gather them together, to methodize them, and to treasure them up in our remembrance; that their collected and united influence may serve, under celestial grace, to counteract our tendency to evil, to defeat the assaults of Satan, to recommend the wisdom of holiness, and to guide us in the way everlasting.—By such a retrospect we shall, much to our advantage, epitomize the elements of an upright life, draw into a narrow compass the substance of many discourses, and lay a deep foundation of Christian principle, on which the extensive and ornamental superstructure of Christian conduct may easily be raised.

The arguments for obedience seem capable of being conveniently arranged under four general heads:—motives of duty, motives of love, motives of honour and shame, and motives of self-interest.

MOTIVES TO DUTY.

1. We are deterred from a sinful, and allured to a righteous course of conduct, by motives of duty to God. He hath made us, in his wisdom, to answer certain purposes of utility and beneficence; and nearly all divines and moralists have agreed, that, even had we nothing to dread from his justice, or to expect from his favour, it would be fitting for us, as beings created with design, to perform the part allotted to us in the universe. Wheels of a great machine, we ought to move in exact obedience to the wise intention of the artist, that the whole work may proceed without disturbance. The subject is supposed to owe a certain allegiance to his sovereign; the child, an affection to his parent, exclusively as a point of duty, and wholly apart from every consideration of his deriving benefit in return. Much more than ought this loyalty and filial piety to be manifested by us, servants and sons, towards God—the King of Kings, and the great Father of the human race.

2. But, as the submission of the heart is far more delightful than the service of blind subjection, we are, secondly, invited into the path of obedience, by a highly interesting class of inducements, under the head of Motives of *Love*.—Revelation, by describing the perfections of the divine nature, holds it up as the

most worthy, the most proper object of love. For if the possession of good qualities excites our esteem for many among our imperfect fellow-creatures, surely a display of the best qualities, and of these in their greatest amplitude and excellence, should have power to raise our warmest affections towards God. Now we know, and ought to remember, that an imitation of these perfections is the proof which he requires of our sincerity in admiring and adoring them. *If ye love me, keep my commandments* *.—*Be ye perfect, even as your Father is perfect* †.

With increased force must this motive to holiness operate, when we contemplate the exertion of the divine perfections in our behalf. How numerous the general bounties of Providence, which, because they are unceasingly enjoyed (let us blush to recollect), we receive without reflecting duly on their origin—the light of the sun, the beauty of nature, the fruitfulness of seasons—our civil liberty, our reformed religion; peace and security in our possessions and dwellings, protection and preservation from day to day,—but above all, those inestimable gifts of divine love, the means of grace it hath multiplied around us, and the hopes it hath graciously opened in redemption, of immortal felicity and

* John, xiv. 15.

† Matt. v. 48.

glory! Need I here advert to innumerable other blessings, mingled in the particular lot of many? Let me ask these too heedless favourites of Heaven, how large a variety of private mercies it has been theirs, more or less, to enjoy? Health, education, virtuous parents, the goodwill of their brethren, prosperity in their undertakings, satisfaction in their families, convenient accommodation, steady and upright friends,—has not a participation of all or the greater number of these advantages greatly sweetened unto them the cup of life? Now, by the solemn voice of revealed religion, we are instructed to consider all these enjoyments as issuing from our Almighty Father. To the same Being alone it is owing, that in many past seasons our lives have been spared, and our outward peace of condition preserved, when trespasses have been committed by us, and not repented of.—How good, and how kind a Power is this! How shall we sufficiently express our gratitude, for these displays of his unmerited love? What shall we render unto the Lord for all his mercies*?—Can we wound the bounteous hand which blesses—which protects, and supports, and saves? Can our hearts repay such benevolence with rebellion; with *any* return but that cheerful service which proceeds from a responsive affection?

* Psalm cxvi. 12.

Still more amiable will the Father of good appear, when we next reflect, that every commandment which he imposes is designed, and tends, to promote our own welfare. He enjoins not any unmeaning penance. He prescribes to us no restriction of *any* kind, except in cases wherein obedience conduces, more than transgression would conduce, to our good. To God, indeed, the fountain of blessedness, no acquisition of happiness can, it is evident, be derived, from *our* compliance with his will. He thus addresses the human race,—“Worship me, that ye may improve your better dispositions; that ye may cherish your inward seriousness, and call down a blessing on your heads. Fulfil my laws, and perform a work, which prudence would dictate, were there no supreme Governor to demand it.”—Must we not love, and cheerfully obey the Power who hath sent us forth upon so free a service; who hath thus directed us to walk in paths, that are, all of them, paths of pleasantness and peace?

Well may we say, that to his goodness there are no bounds; since he hath yet further approved himself as deserving the best obedience of love, in having so formed his laws, that a faithful compliance with them is not more conducive to our own advantage, than to the welfare of our fellow-creatures. If a system of laws were to be framed by man, for promoting the greatest

possible good to his species, they would be only a transcript of the Christian precepts. *Love is the end of the commandment**. In fulfilling our sacred obligations to God, we are performing essential service to our brethren; and pursuing the conduct which has been prescribed by human laws for the preservation of social order, or by usages, for the promotion of harmony in civilized life. We are conducting ourselves in the world as loyal subjects, useful citizens, peaceable neighbours, steady friends. We are contributing our mite towards the prosperity of the community, in our respective relations, as masters or servants, parents or children, brethren or sisters, husbands or wives; as visiting (a great part of true and undefiled religion) the fatherless and the widows in their affliction; as the benevolent bestowers, or the grateful receivers, of kindness. In the goodness, then, which, after having combined our duty with our happiness, has identified both with our utility, have we not a fresh incitement to love and to praise the Lord, and to serve him with the best affections of our hearts?

3. The inducements to do the will of Him that sent us, and to finish his work, which next demand our notice, address themselves to our

* 1 Tim. i. 5:

sense of *honour and shame*. Highly honourable is the office to which we are called, of acting as the servants of God; of working in concert with the holy angels, who are ministers of his will for good; and of resembling the Ruler of the universe himself, in his displays of usefulness and beneficence.

Our sense of honour must likewise derive no trifling satisfaction from reflecting, that we are alive to the beauty of holiness; that our moral perceptions are delicate; that we disdain an unworthy action; and that, although very frail and far from perfection, yet in our principles, and in the general tenour of our conduct, we humbly possess our own approbation, and have not forfeited the esteem of our fellow-men.

Sinfulness, on the other hand, comprises whatever we are accustomed to regard as base and shameful in self-degradation, in imbecility, and in ingratitude. It is a voluntary degradation of the dignity of our nature. Most justly does Christianity describe the transgressor, as living in a state of thralldom. The ambitious, the covetous, the voluptuous, are severally enchained, and enslaved to their ruling passions. *Whosoever committeth sin, of any description, the same is the servant of his sin* *. To him in vain does the Gospel of salvation propose

* John, viii. 34.

high hopes, and an honourable adoption. In vain does it invite him to emancipate himself from his unworthy bondage; to assert his second birth-right—the liberty of the sons of God. He loves to grovel in the land of his captivity, and feels no noble aspiration after freedom. The flesh-pots of Egypt have reconciled him to the ignominy of its fetters.

Not less degrading does disobedience appear, when it is considered as joining the party of the adversaries of Heaven, leaguings in conspiracy with the devil and his angels, and labouring to establish their kingdom of darkness.

A conduct so humbling is still further dishonourable, as it indicates instability and weakness. Can want of fortitude, can feebleness, be more strikingly evinced, than in a deliberate violation of our baptismal vow? a rebellion against the dictates of conscience; an opposition to the clearest conviction of reason; and (if we have ever sought, in devotional exercises, the divine favour or forgiveness) a forfeiture of all those solemn pledges of obedience, which we had brought to the footstool of the Eternal?

Undutiful behaviour, thus degrading and weak, finally consummates its shamefulness in

its ingratitude. To live in transgression is to set at nought all the good which the Father of Mercies hath wrought out for his people; to trample on the bounties of his providence; to make light of all his spiritual dispensations in our behalf; to mock his holy Prophets; to reject the message of his Apostles; to spill the blood of his martyrs; to frustrate all his care and goodness, in graciously sending abroad the Gospel into our lands, and addressing it to our understandings—in a word, to crucify the Lord Jesus afresh, and to do despite unto the Spirit of Grace. Setting aside, for a moment, the extreme danger of this conduct, seems it not deserving of being shunned, on account of its unworthiness? What epithet has society in all ages considered as more disgraceful than that of THANKLESS? How little, on the whole, must any individual appear in his own eyes, who finds himself capable of acting a part at once so mean, so weak, and so insensible?

4. *Self-interest*, the great spring of human conduct, has not been overlooked by reason and revelation, in proposing to us motives for doing the will of Him that sent us, and for finishing his work of duty, of love, and of honour. It only remains then, that we should now superadd to the refined persuasives already mentioned, whatever forcible inducements are found

to address themselves to this most powerful and all-ruling principle. Now, with respect to our PRESENT interest, it is proverbially remarked, that temperance is health; that industry is competence; that exertion is exhilaration; that integrity is the wisest policy, and that contentment is true philosophy:—that to forgive, is to be at peace with man; to be charitable, to purchase the luxury of gratitude; that to regard the opinions of the respectable, is to conciliate esteem; and that to yield obedience to the laws, is to dwell in safety.

Nor must we omit, amongst the arguments which recommend a compliance with the will of our Almighty Father, as conducive to our present interests, to notice that internal tranquillity which flows from it.—How high and exquisite the pleasure derived from being conscious, that we have greatly subdued the evil of our disposition, and obtained the mastery over ourselves: that we are accomplishing the ends of our being, acting serviceably towards our fellow-creatures; properly filling up our place in society; and happily making progress in the life of wisdom, in the purification and exaltation of our nature! How fearless, how placid, are the minds of any, by whom this honourable character may be appropriated! How boldly may they walk amongst men! how quietly retire

to rest! how satisfactory are their secret reflections! what sweet communication can they hold with their Maker!

Reverse now in your minds all these particulars, and you will find in the contrast an opposite class of motives, of equal strength, in dissuading you from undutifulness.

But though godliness be undoubtedly, in these respects, great gain, having abundantly the promise of the life that now is; the merchandise of it will appear to us far more desirable, when it is estimated as a treasure laid up for the life to come. Its future rewards, we are informed, are such, as cannot be fully painted to human conception; as the boldest imagination has never feigned. This, however, we know, and it is sufficient information, that they are sure as the resurrection of Christ, and permanent as the throne of God. And a service of faith and holiness is indeed the more necessary, since it is not only (as we are well aware) a condition, but further, a PREPARATIVE (as we are less apt to regard it) for our enjoyment of everlasting happiness. Whatever dispositions, whatever desires and aversions, have possessed an ascendancy in our minds upon earth, will, it is highly probable, accompany us into another world. They only who have cultivated,

in the days of their pilgrimage, a preference of spiritual to earthly gratifications, are prepared for spiritual bliss. As none but the pure in heart shall SEE God, so none but the pure in heart are capable of experiencing felicity in his presence.

In contrast with these benefits derived from a faithful compliance with the will of Him who sent us on the earth, we are, lastly, invited to review the disadvantages accruing, and to be dreaded, from a neglect of it. It is with the Lord of all power and might, let us remember, that we are engaged. Every trespass is an act of wrestling with God:—vain, unequal struggle! the creature with Him that formed it. If we live and prosper during a course of undutifulness, it is not to his want of power to arrest our steps, but solely to his mercy, and forbearance, and long-suffering, that our preservation and comforts are to be attributed. To Him we owe, and of Him we hold, our life, our breath, our being. Have not the rebellious then cause to tremble beneath a Ruler, who can in one instant deprive them of any of the faculties which they pervert; who can draw back any of the bounties which they abuse, and render them living and awful monuments of his might, and of their own impotence? But what do I say? *Their times are in his hands**; and where is the security, that his power may not, even

* Psalm xxxi. 15.

now, or at any moment, be rousing itself from its rest, to blot them out as defects in his creation—to sweep them away as obstructions to his designs! Heedless and helpless insects that they are, sporting beneath the breath of an omnipotent Creator, who has but to speak the word, and they are gone!

From this cursory view of the power of the Almighty, pass on now to a consideration of his purity. Mark, I pray you, in the records of Revelation, mark in the occurrences of life, to how great an extent sin is the object of his displeasure. In the expulsion of man from Paradise—in the general deluge—in the whole history of the children of Israel, the fact is again and again made manifest. Man, we know, was originally formed for happiness, and it was sin which introduced misfortune and death: each common instance, accordingly, of misfortune, or of death, which occurs, is calculated to recall our attention to its connexion with the great source of evil. Every hour of life may we perceive in ourselves, or in others, proofs of God's unalterable dislike to disobedience, and of his determination to suffer it, in no instance, to escape unpunished. A curse is attached to sin. More or less—nearly or remotely, transgression is pursued, even by temporal punishments, in health, mind, reputation, possessions: not indeed adequate to it as a full measure of retribution, but

an evident earnest of that severer account to which the Deity has threatened and designs to call the guilty. These are beacons of the divine wrath; and surely ought to prompt a flight and determined abstinence from that evil which provoked, and provokes it.

On the whole, a God, all-powerful and all-pure, we know, is not to be trifled with for ever. Always to resist him is utterly impossible. He must and will overcome in the end. Always to provoke him is the extremity of daring. A period *must* be put to the trespasses of those who would be saved: and if they themselves determine not that period, it only remains, that the exhausted long-suffering of the Father of mercies give place to the terrors of his vengeance.

What are the contents of those vials of his anger, which he will in the end pour out on unrepented iniquity, we are not precisely or minutely informed. From the severity, however, with which a criminal course of behaviour is for the most part punished here upon earth, combined with the striking and awful images under which future torments are represented to us in Scripture, we may infer, how greatly these punishments and torments are to be feared. The worm that never dieth, the fire

that is not quenched, intimate at once to the guilty soul the intenseness and the duration of the pains of futurity.

Revelation, indeed, while affording such intimations, finds a comment in the testimony of our own natural feelings; which, while they look forward to eternity, convincingly declare, that it is in the nature of things impossible for the undutiful to be capable of enjoying the delights of heaven; since all their relishes are contrary to such delights; since they are strangers to a desire, to a longing after the pure pleasures, that await the pure at the right hand of God.

Conscience, in like manner, pronounces it to be just, that trespasses, not detected on earth, should be ultimately exposed; that wherever the temporal retribution of guilt is slight, a commensurate suffering should be reserved for it;—in a word, that a more striking difference than appears in the present scene, should be made betwixt the conditions of good and bad men.

With this constellation of motives before us; instigated by so great a variety of hopes and terrors; of arguments speaking to our understanding, and persuasives addressed to our feel-

ings; moved by every sentiment, and principle, and affection, which can be conceived capable of acting on intelligent beings; of fixing our determination, and invigorating our energies; by a sense of our subjection to God; by a love of his goodness; by our strongest perceptions of honour and shame; by the desire of our present and everlasting welfare—thus warned by menaces, to flee from the wrath to come, and allured by invitations, to rush into the arms of divine love, can any one hesitate to adopt the language of King David, *Lord, I am thy servant—truly I am thy servant**: or to say, *In the volume of thy book it is written of me, that I ought to do thy will: I am content, I am eager to do it: yea, thy law is in my heart †.*

Let such of us as feel disposed to agree in this wise conclusion, remember, that all these collected inducements, which incline us to the service of the Almighty, are of equal force in urging reasonable creatures to yield unto him an obedience of earnestness. Little have they effected, and feebly are they felt, if their influence be not acknowledged in our lives, as well as by our lips; if they prompt us not to GIVE UP ourselves to the service of our Creator; to regard him as the great master and proprietor of

* Psalm cxvi. 16.

† Psalm xl. 7, 8.

our time, our talents, our wealth, and whatever we possess; to apply these trusts, for trusts they are, wholly and exclusively, to the promotion of his glory:—in a word, to render unto him a similar obedience to that which confers on the servant of an earthly master the characters of faithfulness, diligence, and attachment. “To him, therefore, with the Son and the Holy Ghost, let us give, as we are most bounden, continual duty:—submitting ourselves entirely to his holy will and pleasure, and studying to serve him in righteousness and true holiness all the days of our lives.”

S E R M O N II.

ON EXPERIENCE.

LUKE, CHAP. XII. VERSE 57.

*Yea, and why, even of yourselves, judge ye not
what is right?*

WISDOM is the daughter of experience. Even the sagacious conclusions of Solomon himself were derived from his acquaintance with the emptiness and the misery of folly. Thus, in general, HE is a wise man, who, after directing his attention to past circumstances and results, establishes it as a rule, in conformity to which it will be proper to regulate his conduct, that similar results will follow similar circumstances in time to come.

Our Saviour introduces the words which I have above recited, by reminding his hearers that this was the principle on which they were accustomed to form various reasonable conjectures respecting the daily occurrences of life. *When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower: and when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat: and you thus confidently*

predict these changes of the weather, because you have, in a variety of former instances, observed them to have been uniformly preceded by the phenomena, from the appearance of which you once more augur their approach. The rule is plain and simple. What has been aforetime, will be hereafter: and when you again observe its commencement, you may infallibly predict its close. Wherefore then will you refuse to direct your moral conduct, by a maxim so trite, the regulator of your worldly opinions and proceedings? Ye discern by its aid the face of the sky and the earth: wherefore should you not apply it to the discernment of your best interests? Yea, and why even of yourselves, of your own past experience, judge ye not what is right?

Now, although, in relation to particular occurrences, the separate experience of every one of us be different, there is yet a variety of general observations which all these diversities tend in common to establish, and which nearly all men must necessarily have deduced from the events of their past lives.

Here then, Christians, taking a retrospective view, let us call these observations successively under our examination; and while we assent, as we must, to the justness of each, let us unite

in forming from it such conclusions and resolutions, as its acknowledged truth will render prudent and necessary.

1. That from the intimate connexion which subsists betwixt one part of life and another, the consequences of transgression extend to a distance, and are accumulated to a magnitude, almost inconceivable in the hour of offence, is one great truth established by general experience. Most of you, my brethren, must have arrived at this conclusion, though, perhaps, by different ways. A single error, committed by one hearer, at some remote period, has worn out for itself a channel of misfortune, along which, down to the present day, his whole life has flowed. Another is bewailing the consequences of his having, long ago, neglected his opportunities of early instruction; since he has found, that, by an improvement of them, he might have availed himself of advantages which he must now suffer to pass by him unenjoyed. A third having, perhaps, for a short period of levity, interrupted his regular habits of assiduous study, or application to business, although on his speedy and penitent return to duty, assuredly reconciled, through Christ, to Heaven, is paying a tenfold forfeit of his fault, in reputation, to men, less prompt (he finds) than Heaven to forgive; or in fortune, to a world, less likely than Heaven to

prove, when once neglected, a second time favourable. How many has one fatal surrender of principle to passion, at which they had determined to stop, led forward to another, and another, and another, until they at this hour find themselves enslaved to an habit, against which the voice of reason ineffectually remonstrates? Need I point out the lesson inculcated by these recollections? Such as, being conscious of them, are yet in the prime of life, will doubtless of themselves judge what is right. Before you, my friends, extends the fair prospect, of yet continuing many years upon this earth. Beware of individual trespasses. Abstain from those short excursions in sinfulness, on which you are frequently inclined to venture, by vainly persuading yourselves, that they are venial in guilt, and unimportant in their consequences. You know not, in truth, how tremendous may be their consequences; or rather, the past has already awfully warned you, that, far from being deplored and forgotten in a day, they may embitter, with their baneful and unterminating influence, the very latest hour of your terrestrial existence.

2. But in reviewing those past transactions of life, by which your present happiness or conduct has been materially affected, you may ascend still higher than your marked deviations from ree-

itude, to the circumstances, probably in themselves less criminal, in which such deviations have originated. How much of your past misconduct, how much of your present unhappiness, is capable of being traced up to the intimacies you have formed, the amusements in which you have indulged, the situations into which you have incautiously permitted yourselves to be thrown! All have been admonished (O! that they were wise, and would consider the warning) how important it will be to their principles, to their practice, to their peace, to be, in time to come, scrupulous in their choice of friends; guarded, sparing, and apprehensive in their pleasures; and even sufficiently distrustful of their best resolutions, to be watchful how they expose themselves in societies or in scenes pregnant in any degree with spiritual danger.

3. It is not, however, exclusively, either by positive immoralities, or by an incautious intimacy with the more obvious occasions of them, that the condition of men, at a distant period, is influenced. The slightest retrospective glance will remind them, that many issues of the utmost magnitude have, primarily, proceeded from trivial, and if any thing could be ascribed to accident, it might be said, to *fortuitous*, occurrences. Life is one long chain of events, each of which depends, not only on that to

which it is visibly and immediately linked, but on many others apparently too distant and too detached to affect it: and hence it often happens, that the grandest results are remotely occasioned by a contemptible and hardly perceptible agency—as the broad and impetuous river is derived from some scanty spring that is scarcely observed, while it gushes from the cleft of a rock. Reflect for one moment on your present situation. Cast back your thoughts along the different connected circumstances of only a few years, and you will probably discover, that a short excursion, a rencounter, a slight scheme formed in a careless moment, has led forwards to one strange effect after another, till it has at length produced the most wonderful reverses and the most momentous events in your life. Consider now, in the same manner, the present condition, in which, I trust, you perceive your immortal spirit. By what a seeming nothing has its better frame been formed! A book, which you have carelessly opened in an interval of leisure; the course which a convivial conversation has chanced to take; the interview of a single hour, perhaps of a few moments, with an individual of strong mind, or of deeply-marked character; an argument, a striking phrase which has reached your ears from the pulpit—some one of these singly immaterial circumstances has chanced to effect, I would

say, as a Christian teacher, it *has* by divine influence effected, an entire revolution in your sentiments and actions. It has begun with staggering you in your former opinions. It has sent you to solitude. It has thrown your mind back upon itself. New trains of reflection have then opened to your view. These you have sought to aid by farther inquiry. You have conversed on new subjects. You have addicted yourself to new studies. You have joined yourself to new society.—Perhaps you have prayed. And thus, from so very small a beginning, you have come forth—hail! admirable work of divine grace—a new creature, a different character;—your principles new, your ideas new, your determinations new, your hopes and your fears new, your conduct new. The little grain of mustard-seed has gradually expanded itself, until it has become the largest and most beautiful of all plants. Something like what I have here endeavoured to describe, has at least formed, I doubt not, part of the experience of many. Now, you, my prudent friend, who HAVE experienced it, why even of your own self judge you not that which is right? By these astonishing changes, arising from insignificant commencements, ought you not to be warned how very expedient it still is that you should walk circumspectly in ordinary life? Ought you not to consider, that, in a state of

trial, you are ever in imminent danger of relapsing; and that a similar trifle to that which has been the first instrument in confirming you as a child of God, may conduct you back, by a series of consequences, unto the power of the prince of darkness?—MAY conduct you thither, do I say?—ah! has not the supposition been too faithfully realized? In attending, then, to any distant, minute circumstances, which have led to the establishment of your better resolutions, learn to advert to other remote, and probably, in themselves, not less insignificant, causes of your violation of them. And let whatever occupation, research, resort, has formerly at all influenced your departure from rectitude, be regarded as ground to be henceforward trodden, if trodden at all, with extreme caution, although in itself it may by men be deemed indifferent, and though it may not perhaps be specifically prohibited, either in the law or the Gospel. Experience, thus improved, may rightly, though with reverence, be denominated “the providence of man.”

On the whole, however well-established may be your principles and habits, you are still, and at all times, in a sufficient measure to excite vigilance—the child of circumstance and situation. Account then nothing to be really indifferent. Stand at all seasons strictly on your

guard. Watch, for in such an hour, and in such a manner as you think not, the spirit of Heaven, or the spirit of seduction, cometh. Let what the world terms a trivial or accidental occurrence, be, in your vocabulary, a link in the order of providence : a means and vehicle of grace, or a step in the path of ruin. So arrange, as much as lies in your power, the general circumstances of your earthly condition, as to render them, on the whole, favourable to piety and virtue : and with respect to all more casual impressions, to such events as are not, in any degree, at your disposal, strive to settle in your heart a solidity and a seriousness—an habitual devotion, which, aided by divine grace, may obviate their possible evil tendency.

4. On revolving in your mind the past occurrences of your life, all linked together, as we have above shown them to be, you can hardly fail to recollect instances, and these I will presume by no means few, of evil resulting in good. That which you at one time had rashly deemed a calamity, has led on to unexpected prosperous events ;—or, what is infinitely preferable to all earthly prosperity, has produced an essential improvement in your principles and conduct. How many maxims of unlimited trust in Providence, of submission to present evils, of veneration for the wisdom and good-

ness of the Deity, ought to be generated in your mind by this one recollection! Under whatever distresses you may happen to labour, ought you not to look forward to a period when you will discover and own them all, to have been the means appointed by infinite Beneficence, for the promotion of your happiness, if not in this present world, assuredly, unless obstructed by your own folly, in the next?

5. Reflection on experience will further remind most persons of the different ideas respecting the same circumstances, which they have entertained at different periods of their lives. Certain objects have, at one season, appeared requisite to your felicity. Towards the attainment of these, as you may well remember, the whole force and bent of your mind has been directed. They have been the points on which all your hopes have centred; the pinnacles of enjoyment on which you proposed to rest, in an entire contentment and tranquillity. In a short time, your sentiments have undergone a change: these objects of your fond contemplation and affection have ceased to appear desirable in your eyes: they have been stripped of all that magic lustre with which your ardent imagination had invested them: you have turned with equal eagerness to different attainments; and these too have had their day, and

proved dissatisfactory. *Why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right?* Can you hesitate to conclude, from these recollections, that the future is most likely to prove, to your perception, precisely as the past has proved? that, possibly, although reason be in your breast now matured, the prize after which you may be at present toiling, will, ere long, share the fate of all the others; that you will become weary of the toy, and relinquish the search; that you may possess it, and find that it is vanity and vexation?

Take warning from hence, my friend and hearer, not to act precipitately in any of your proceedings. Pause and reflect before you rush forward to an attainment, which may prove, after all, only an imaginary good. Walk round it, and contemplate it in every accessible point of view. Consider it in all its bearings and remote dependencies. Attend to its various unfavourable points, and place them fairly in opposition to its advantages. Wait to ask, if the passion which impels you forward be sanctioned by the calm decision of reason. Consult the advice of prudent and principled friends, older and wiser than yourself: patiently and candidly listen to their opinion, and without being slavishly controlled by their judgment,

weigh at least, deliberately, the objections which they state.

6. But, lastly, under all these changes of opinion, under all circumstances whatever, and in every period of life, it must be deeply engraven on the recollection of every one, that a strict adherence to duty has invariably been found advantageous. Piety and integrity have stood your friends in difficulties; have carried you through embarrassments; have removed obstacles in your way; have heightened to you the joy of success, and have consoled your sorrows in adversity. To a temporary dereliction of these firm supports, you can trace all your **SERIOUS** evils in life: to this, and not to any other cause it is, that you owe all your truly unpleasant recollections. Your trespasses, more, far more, than your calamities, are the ghosts which haunt your memory. Different worldly advantages have, at different seasons, been decked by your glowing fancy with the charms of the sovereign good; and you have lived to pronounce your eager search after all of them to have been only the changeableness of human folly. But you do not repent of one moment which you have given to duty. Any fidelity in your dealings; any conquest over passions; any restraint imposed on speech, on appetite, on conduct; any past season of solidity and applica-

tion; any acts of usefulness or of kindness, undertaken from pure motives;—do not these, I ask, scattered more or less rarely throughout every period of your existence, constitute the topics of your fondest retrospection? Look for the conclusion within your own heart. Tell me, my brother, what is now passing in it. Are you not, at this moment, saying within yourself, “Yes; I do indeed perceive, and must own, that holiness, Christian holiness, in its widest acceptation, including my duties to God and my neighbour, is the wisest choice, and the best course, upon the whole. All my experiences, all my recollections, conspire to tell me so. I wish that I had crowded more of it into the past: but the past is now no longer in my power. The present, however, is yet my own; and I vow—may God preside over the determination!—to employ myself in the cultivation of this unquestionable good; in the enrichment of my future harvest of reflection; and in obtaining for my spirit peace at the last.”—Cherish, cherish the happy impression: fan the sacred flame which God hath kindled in your bosom. Sensible of your weakness, and aware of your temptations, welcome the entrance, secure the permanence, and provide for the improvement of the precious emanation of Heaven, by prayer for an increase of that celestial succour, which can alone carry the desires and re-

solutions it has already suggested, unto good and lasting effect.

To sum up all:—Experience being, as we have seen, the great preceptor of wisdom, the old are, in general, wiser than the young—in proportion to the greater number of consentaneous facts which have passed beneath their notice. Yet even the young may reach a high degree of wisdom, if they will supply the scantiness and imperfection of personal knowledge, by reposing confidence in the experience of those who have lived longer, seen more, and thought deeper than themselves. We read, both in sacred and profane history, that aged persons, in the early periods of the world, held the first places in all public assemblies; that, at their approach, the young men rose and uncovered their heads; and that, in all public councils and conferences, their opinion was the first demanded. This peculiar reverence was offered to old men, in consideration of their being then the only repositories of experience. In process of time, the wisdom of the old, being committed to writing, descended to their distant posterity. Books are in this manner now multiplied on all hands, by which the sages of other times, being dead, yet speak; and the world is continually advancing in knowledge—it would be advancing in wisdom if it would

rightly apply its accessions of knowledge;—as each succeeding generation, in addition to its own experience, possesses the accumulated and improved experience of all the ages which have preceded it. Add then, my brother, whatever you have heard and read, to the little you may have remarked or felt; and wherever you find these various separate testimonies concurring in their accounts of the past, wait, I beseech you, for no further demonstrations to be derived from your personal history; account the evidence to be already complete and infallible; and hasten to resolve and to act, in conformity with this salutary conviction. You will thus anticipate the sagacity of advanced years. You will surpass in that quality even him who is called the wisest man, but whose matured understanding was the product of personal transgression. You will happily avoid those misfortunes, and those remorsees, which, if you should wait to be taught wisdom solely from your own experience, you would too assuredly have to pay as the price of it; and, while thus acting in a great measure from your reliance on the testimony of others, you may, without presumption, regard and appropriate the words of your Saviour as suitable to your own case, *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed* *.

* John, xx. 29.

Alas ! too many, too many even of those who have proceeded to the extreme and perilous verge of life, after having again and again experienced the irrefragable truth of every observation which has been offered, have hitherto but very faintly and imperfectly endeavoured to convert their knowledge into wisdom.— Either their convictions, sudden and evanescent, have failed to produce corresponding resolutions; or their resolutions, if formed, have proved too feeble to issue forth in a steady and persevering amendment. Are they not still wandering, trifling, transgressing, in those same beaten courses, which, they have repeatedly found, conduct only to shame and sorrow? Are they not at best walking round the city of God, and exclaiming, “ How beautiful are her gates ! ” while, although in transitory visits they have felt and acknowledged that peace and happiness dwell only within, their abode is to this hour in the surrounding world, where, with all their earliest fondness and avidity, they are toiling and panting after its vanities? These, then, however advanced in years, are still but very babes and sucklings in understanding. For, by infancy, in the sense of reason and religion, we are not to understand the age of bodily helplessness, but the season of mental inconsideration. We are children at any age, infants even in decrepitude, if, when we have

become men in years, we have not yet relinquished childish things; if we have not learned to reflect, to reason, to look forward; to trust in Providence; to submit ourselves to the divine will; to prepare for the numberless vicissitudes of life; to attach ourselves to virtue, as the sovereign good; to flee from vice, as bearing only an alluring gloss, a treacherous appearance of delight;—in a word, as disciples of Jesus, to profit by our past failures, and to improve our present moments, by discovering our imperfection, by acknowledging our frailty, by believing in the name of Christ our Saviour, and by imploring for succour at the throne of grace. These (although on some of them our present limits forbid our casting more than this passing glance) are all acts of duty, of which a review of what has already happened in the lot and life of each of us, is well adapted to inculcate the importance and necessity. God grant that we may in this manner improve our experience, growing in wisdom as we advance in life; that every revolving season, that every returning sabbath, may make us better as it finds us older; and fitter for our latter end as it brings us nearer to it, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer. Amen.

S E R M O N III.

ON CULTIVATING A SERIOUS FRAME OF
MIND.

I PETER, I. PART OF VERSE 17.

Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

WHOEVER is at all conversant with the sacred writings must have remarked, that they insist, in many places, and by different modes of expression, on the duty of fixing and cherishing in the heart, an habitual composure and seriousness. Whether they admonish the children of men to *stand in awe* *—to *set the Almighty Ruler always before them* †—or to *gird up the loins of their minds*; and to *be sober* ‡—this hallowing of the soul, this inward solemnity, is, evidently, the point of obedience which they aim at inculcating. *Walking in the FEAR of God* is another favourite phrase, employed by the holy penmen, to express the same meaning. We are commanded to *work out our salvation with trembling* §: and, in the words which I have chosen as the subject of this discourse, to *pass the time of our sojourning here in fear*.

* Psalm iv. 4.

† Psalm xvi. 8.

‡ 1 Peter, i. 13.

§ Philip. ii. 12:

That this is a most reasonable and necessary admonition; that gravity should ever be the prevailing feature in the characters of the disciples of Jesus Christ, none can deny who will maturely consider,—1st, that they are beings having a variety of duties to fulfil:—2dly, that they are the children of sorrow:—3dly, that they are surrounded with temptations:—4thly, that they are frail, and utterly insufficient to their own deliverance from evil:—5thly, that they are sinful:—6thly, that they are short-lived: and lastly, that they are accountable to Heaven, in another world, for their conduct.

1. During all the days of our sojourning in this lower world, we have, all of us, a large variety of serious concerns to attend to, and of important DUTIES to fulfil. Although the Father of mercies has graciously permitted that our journey should be interspersed with seasons of rest and refreshment, we must at no moment forget that this present existence is a state of service and of trial; and as such, presenting a work of no trifling labour to be executed, and difficulties not inconsiderable to be overcome. The purpose for which we were placed here on earth is, doubtless, not solely to take our ease, and to revel in enjoyment for many years, but, under the divine assistance, to recover ourselves from our fallen state, by a course of active ex-

ertion. Every individual has, or ought to have, a calling in life, or a sphere of usefulness, in which it is his duty and his proper business to move. His family, and the larger family of the community, have a claim upon his diligence. Nor are our duties exclusively confined to that occupation which constitutes our particular province in life. We have charities to administer; example to hold forth; advice to communicate; a long train of urgent obligations to discharge, as relatives, neighbours, friends, citizens, subjects. Before, my fellow-Christians, we can be thoroughly sensible of these multifarious demands upon our activity, and properly concerned as to our faithful compliance with them, you cannot but acknowledge that any tendency to levity, either in the mind or the behaviour, must have subsided into composure and thoughtfulness. He who is without serious thought, it may be held as an axiom, is without solid purpose.

2. And this gravity, and soberness of disposition and deportment, will appear the more expedient, when we next consider, that in addition to our weight of duties, great as it is, a still heavier burden of CARES AND SORROWS has been inherited from our first parents. The posterity of Adam, we are told, are doomed, not only to earn their bread with the sweat of

their brow, but also to gather the fruits of life, in the midst of thorns and thistles. *Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards**.—Such was his melancholy destination from the fall; and in the sad experience of the whole human race has it been strictly and severely accomplished. What a succession of sorrows do we encounter in our pilgrimage! We entertain hopes, only to be disappointed: we lay plans, to be defeated: we form friendships, to be dissolved. Some who are present, among the young and inexperienced, may not hitherto, it is possible, have received their portion, in this common lot of suffering humanity. The candle of prosperity may have shone upon them from their birth, and they may have as yet had no cause for vexation and heaviness. They may be flattering their hearts that they shall go softly all their days, and never behold affliction; while the wheel may be, even at this moment, turning—ere long it will most assuredly turn—which will bring them down from their eminence into the dust. *Though a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many* †. Now, although we may not be required to increase the miseries of this existence, by immoderate anxiety concerning evils that threaten, or excessive gloom under such as have befallen

* Job, v. 7.

† Eccles. xi. 8.

us, it must, unquestionably, be prudent to accommodate our minds, in some degree, to our unfortunate condition ; to take precaution, lest the evil day, on its arrival, should find us in all the unprepared madness of mirth ; in the feebleness and enervation of a voluptuous and unreflecting life ; ill adapted to bear up against the pressure of calamity : or, if troubles already bear us down, to forward their intended use, by hallowing our souls with sober thoughts and pious purposes ; by providing that our tribulation shall generate patience ; and patience experience ; and experience of the sadness of the present life, a calm, but serious hope of a better*.

3. From this brief examination of our duties and sorrows, as inimical to an habitual riot of the spirits, we proceed to derive a new argument for sober-mindedness, from a view of the TEMPTATIONS with which we are surrounded. Our souls are beset, on all sides, with dangers. There is no one pleasure, however harmless, we enjoy, under which a snare is not concealed. In all the fruits of this wreck of Paradise, sin has mingled a secret poison ; and the serpent, the subtlest beast of the field, still lurks amongst the fairest and purest flowers that spring beneath our feet. We cannot fulfil our ordinary

* Rom. v. 3.

duties, exempt from trials of our temper. We cannot converse with a common acquaintance, safe from being betrayed into impropriety of speech. We are unable to live a single day in the world, without the hazard of contracting an immoderate attachment to it. A taint of vice may silently and slowly steal upon our best and sincerest services: and even here, in this temple of worship itself, in this ark and sanctuary of pious affections, Satan, in the form of an ostentatious motive, or an unholy thought, may intrude amongst the sons of God*. Those enemies, in short, against whom we have promised, in the vow of our baptism, to contend, are every where in arms against us: and though, by the grace of God, the regenerate and well-principled may, through habits of resistance, have established their souls in a superiority to common trials, no one human being is at any time perfectly secure. Environed then by all these formidable evils, having to guard against temptation on the right hand and on the left, can we deem it proper to revel in the bowers of pleasure, or to raise the roar of intemperate mirth, as if all were at peace and in safety around us? The soldier on his watch, who dreads being surprised by the foe, passes not the night of apprehension in jollity or indifference.—So, my Christian hearers, in our re-

* Job, i. 6.

religious warfare, sedateness, let us be assured, is the brother of circumspection; and with much propriety has Scripture conjoined the precepts—*Be sober; be vigilant**. Does not recollection, indeed, whisper, that whenever, in time past, we have been drawn aside from the right path, it was in the season of giddiness, and during the banishment of thought? And why should we once more deliver ourselves over to that height of exhilaration in which we are aware, that evil imperceptibly possesses the breast, while principle is forgotten, and the voice of conscience is unheard?

A serious frame of mind is necessary in this our warfare, as the protector of Christian purity. It does not, like levity, harmonize with temptation. It converts the bosom into holy ground, from the precincts of which the evil one, smitten with awe, will retreat. It is an inward monitor, continually reminding us that Christ hath no fellowship with Belial. It preserves us from the contagion of the vices of this world, by creating in the soul a discordance even with its vanities. It is a temper ever on the watch to check the exuberance of fancy, the levity of mirth, and the riot of hilarity: to say to indulgence, when insensibly gliding into folly, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further. It*

* 1 Peter, v. 8.

places the soul which it occupies on an high eminence, above the perils incidental to any communication with the wicked, which in the course of worldly affairs may be occasionally requisite; and exempts it from the intrusion of those impure visitants, which are so apt to insinuate themselves into frivolous minds, when they are softened, and lulled, and left unguarded, by what is too often, in their case, rashly and falsely termed harmless gaiety, or allowable enjoyment.

4. But the wisdom of seriousness will be still more apparent, when we remember, fourthly, that, thus surrounded by temptations, we are ourselves most exceedingly FRAIL, and inclined, by our inborn corruption, to yield to them. *In our hearts naturally dwelleth no good thing**. When Satan addresses us, instead of fleeing away from him, or, like our Saviour, commanding him to get him behind us, it is too true, my brethren, that we are prone, by disposition, to welcome his arrival, and to court his stay. We know, that, for the correction of this unhappy perverseness, we are altogether dependent upon the Father of Spirits. Have we frequently defied unlawful allurements? Have we made considerable advancement in holiness? It is by the influence of the all-strengthening

* Rom. vii. 18.

Spirit of Heaven, that we are what we are *. And if we wish or intend to persevere in the way of life, it is to the same power alone that we must look for support. Sedateness then will be admitted to be the proper mood, for the reception of this celestial visitant. We cannot expect that he will make his hallowed abode, in the midst of volatility and folly. And it is so awful a consideration that God should vouchsafe to dwell at all with man, that it well deserves to be entertained with the profoundest reverence. Indeed, as this consideration is most suitably received, it can only be rightly cherished and improved, by an habitual sobriety of mind.

5. Man, however (for it is necessary yet further to humble him in his own opinion), is more than frail: he is positively guilty. He is not merely a creature DISPOSED to fall:—in many, in countless instances he HAS FALLEN. Our tendency to evil has fully evolved itself. To original depravity we have added actual transgression. The seed of the tare, instead of being destroyed, has been suffered to multiply, and to choke the good grain. The root of bitterness has shot rankly upwards, and extended its branches on every side. The fountain of evil, not continuing sealed, has gushed forth

* 2 Cor. xv. 10.

into an ample stream. The best and most guarded have, on many occasions, on many more occasions than memory can retrace, departed from the law of God; and have found too much reason to join with David in exclaiming, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth**!

If holding in recollection, then, this view of our sinfulness, we connect it with a contemplation of the divine attributes—if we represent to ourselves a God, every where present, infinitely holy, strictly just, all-powerful—we shall properly perceive, and remember, that while thus guilty, we are marked by the inspection of his omnipresence, obnoxious to the indignation of his purity; that we have incurred a severe retribution from his justice, and cannot escape from his power. Admitting, for the moment, that a future world were an uncertainty, the dread of TEMPORAL punishment, and the bare possibility of eternal woe, which such considerations might be supposed to suggest, seem sufficient to inspire the mind with seriousness. Even when we contemplate the MERCY of the Divinity, which spreads a soft light over his other attributes, the reflection, while it consoles, must only add to our concern; as a sense of our utter unworthiness will, one would imagine,

* Psalm xix. 12. (Prayer-book.)

tend naturally to damp the hopes of our pardon, or to sadden the belief in our safety.

Mental sobriety, then, is the proper concomitant of remorse;—a disposition well adapted to beings like us, whose iniquities cannot be numbered. To say nothing of the indecency of a contrary habit, can we fail to perceive its imminent danger? Is the convicted criminal likely to obtain mercy or pardon, by assuming at the bar an appearance of hilarity and unconcern? Whence can he expect that a mitigation of his punishment will proceed, but from the supposition of his entertaining—from the tenderness awakened in the judge by his *demonstrating*—a deep and fixed contrition for his offence?

6. To this argument in favour of internal seriousness, derived from a view of our condition as sinful, another, not perhaps less powerful, may be added, which proceeds from the recollection of our being SHORT-LIVED. A span, a breath, the shadow of a passing cloud, the fading flower, the ephemeral insect, are the striking but just similitudes employed, to represent the term of our duration upon earth. We are beings born to look about us, and to die. Is there nothing to expel volatility from the mind,—is there nothing to

inspire solemnity and melancholy in the consideration that life, with all its joys, is fleeting; that every transient hour steals some portion away from it; that now, while I am speaking, and you, my friends, are listening, we are all carried nearer to its speedy termination. How near we may be to its close, we are unable to tell: for short as it is at the best, the events of each day prove it to be moreover extremely precarious. Is it fitting then that the victim should sport before that altar, where every preparation announces that it will shortly bleed? Ought we to give loose to riot at that festive board, where a sword is suspended by a hair over our heads? In the record preserved by the sacred writings, of the two great destructions by water and fire, it is related, that *the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play, till the flood came and took them away—till it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.* And though floods of water and cataracts of fire do not overwhelm the present generations of men, yet the silent devastations of time or accident continually carry off one unthinking individual after another; so that to us, who are come in these latter days, it may still be said, with the strictest propriety, *Now these things have happened for examples**—*O that men*

* 1 Cor. x. 11:

were wise, that they would consider this—that they would remember their latter end* ; and learn to be serious from a sense of the necessity of expediting the business of a short and precarious existence, and of preparing for the impending mandate of their dismissal.

7. But reflections on the brevity and uncertainty of this life, derive their principal awfulness and main importance, from the great events which are to follow its termination. We are short-lived : we vanish away : we are accountable to Heaven for our conduct. *It is appointed unto all men once to die ; and after that the judgment.* The final, and grand, and conclusive argument, then, recommending inward seriousness, is the voice of the trumpet which shall summon us before the tribunal of Christ, sounded as it is by the angel of prophecy. For every deed done in the body ; for every sinful, every IDLE word spoken ; for every present thought dishonourable to integrity, or tainting to purity, must a strict and faithful account be rendered unto the Searcher of hearts. In the hearts of beings, then, like us, my brethren, for whom a trial so severe and so terrible is prepared, and who have enlarged to so vast a magnitude the roll of our offences, ought not se-

* Deut. xxxii. 29.

riousness and awe to be the prevailing dispositions? For US who are advancing with steps thus rapid to the judgment throne of justice and purity—a throne before which we are so ill qualified to stand; a place of retribution where the everlasting rewards of which we know we are so little worthy, and the punishments which we have so justly merited, are to be apportioned—gravity is surely the proper livery of the mind. Serve the Lord, O man! who art shortly to appear before him, with a reverential and cautious dread of offending*.—Place the day of wrath habitually before thine eyes, that thou mayest beware of heaping up to thyself wrath against its arrival † †.

After having thus exhibited, in a single view, the various, urgent, and awful motives to the

* Psalm ii. 11.

† Rom. ii. 5.

|| “ Ah, my friends,” exclaims a religious writer, whose words we may borrow in summing up these reflections, “ while we laugh, all things are serious around us :—God is serious, who exerciseth patience towards us ; Christ is serious, who shed his blood for us ; the Holy Ghost is serious, who striveth against the obstinacy of our hearts ; the Holy Scriptures bring to our ears the most serious things in the world ; the Holy Sacraments represent the most serious and awful matters ; the whole creation is serious in serving God and us ; all that are in heaven or hell are serious :—how then can we be otherwise ?”—YOUNG.

cultivation of internal seriousness, I must beg leave, in conclusion, to state precisely, what is to be understood by such a disposition. For it is no austere devotion, no servile and superstitious dread of God as an enemy and an avenger—no *uninterrupted* contemplation of earthly evils, or spiritual themes, no *hourly* dwelling of the mind amidst graves, or self-summoning to judgment, such as would at once obstruct the discharge of active services, and banish that secret satisfaction, that perennial serenity, and that contented participation of the blessings of Providence, which are the meed of a sincere love of God, and of an habitual endeavour to serve him;—it is none of these exactions that are required. No! reasonable occupation in the affairs of life, and a temperate but cautious use of its truly innocent and sober gratifications, seem not inconsistent with the strictest Christianity.

What then does our holy religion prohibit? It forbids that our time should be lavished, or much employed; our thoughts, our souls absorbed, or deeply engaged, in the things of the present scene. It forbids us, not only to live altogether without God, but to live without holding daily intercourse with him in the world. It places a barrier, which the candidate for

Heaven must not pass, betwixt sober, vigilant, reserved gratification, and the levities, vanities, and fooleries which surround him. It totally interdicts a LIVING unto pleasure of any kind; a self-exposure to volatility; a coldness in religion; a heedlessness concerning either the more leading, or the inferior moral obligations of life.

In short, all the arguments on which we have here expatiated, will be found at once motives to seriousness, and modes of it: considerations constituting, when habitually cherished, the very frame of mind which, as simply noticed, they conspire to inculcate.

The love and fear of God is the first and uppermost principle in the heart of the true believer. Complacency and gladness he regards as not wholly withheld from the faithful servant of an infinitely good and kind Master; but they are not permitted to disturb that timid awe, which becomes a servant, who has left much neglected, and done much which he knows he ought not to have done. Not losing sight of the great purpose of his being, he often and deeply revolves within himself in what manner he has hitherto laboured to accomplish it; what time he possesses for supplying

imperfections; and how he is likely to fare when he shall go hence. He is anxious to make a friend of God as a refuge and helper in the apprehended evils and dangers of existence. He sedulously cultivates an habitual aptitude to avail himself of every passing occurrence, the state of public affairs, the transactions of each day, successes and calamities, every spectacle of woe, every scene of pleasure, and, above all, of every warning offered in public instruction, by converting them into themes of spiritual meditation, and occasions of moral improvement. Well knowing the power of his spiritual adversaries—the difficulty of the labour that Heaven hath set before him—the frailty of his nature, and the side on which he is chiefly vulnerable, he abstains from any intemperance even in innocent enjoyment, and stops far short of the point of danger. He is actuated by the dread of a relapse into forsaken offences, as well as by an apprehension of his being suddenly removed from the world, before he has done all that is needful for his salvation. And although these grave but wholesome fears are not, and need not be, continually present to reflection, yet is their influence perpetually felt;—as men are wont to pursue their path in the day, without thinking of the sun by whose beams they are enlightened.

That we may still further increase and cherish that habitual seriousness, which has on the present occasion been the subject of our meditations, let it be our resolution and our study to attend with regularity, and with an honest desire of spiritual improvement, the various public services of our church; while we determine to be not less careful or systematic in observing the duties of family devotion; and while we frequently snatch from the employments of the world an hour to be dedicated to private meditation and prayer. Daily let us delight ourselves in the law of God, and in the Gospel of his divine Son;—at the same time nourishing our internal sobriety, and elevating all the devout affections, by psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, if not uttered with the voice of melody, at least ascending to the gate of Heaven, in the silent but acceptable music of the heart. Let us regulate our hours of converse and relaxation with a view to the preservation, and, if possible, the improvement of our sober-mindedness, and strictness of religious principles. And, lest deceitful levity, our smiling and insidious enemy, should still attempt to introduce, unperceived, a forgetfulness of God and of duty into the breast, let us, finally, study to guard against his encroachments, by descending into the hut of poverty, by acquainting ourselves with the mansion of

mourning; by sitting down in the chamber of sickness; by contemplating the bed of death; or by pondering, at intervals, in the place of tombs! So shall we pass the time of our sojourning in fear: we shall work into the heart, and into the conduct, that general solidity and sobriety, which are at once the necessary source, and the sure indication, of a well-regulated and well-disposed breast: we shall, in a word, stand like men who wait for their Lord; and who, when he cometh and knocketh, are in a proper frame of mind, to answer, "We are ready," and to open to him immediately.

S E R M O N I V.

CHRISTIAN PATRIOTISM.—A FAST SERMON.

PSALM CXXII. VERSES 7, 8, 9.

Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces: for my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good.

PATRIOTISM has, in every age and nation of the world, been regarded as a very exalted virtue. So highly indeed was it estimated by the heathen states of antiquity, that they accounted it worthy of superseding, in many instances, the ties of domestic attachment. To instil this noble principle was the chief business of education. Citizens, to prove that they were true to it, thronged into every office of unrecompensed trouble, and courted posts of imminent danger. They even looked forward with complacency, or rather with ardour, to any opportunity of sacrificing their lives, for the sake of the land which had given them birth.

Not less distinguished were the chosen people of God, for the same attachment towards

their native country. Dragged in captivity into a foreign land, *they sat down by the waters of Babylon, and wept, when they remembered thee, O Zion!* When, in cruel mirth, and savage exultation over their sorrows, their enemies demanded of them a song, we read that they hung up their harps upon willows, and asked, with a sullen but natural dejection, *How CAN we sing the Lord's song in a strange country*?* Daniel, exalted to high authority in that foreign state, was unable to forget that he was still only pre-eminent in servitude, and that his preference was due to the land of his fathers; for it is recorded, that he was wont *to pray three times a day, with his windows open towards Jerusalem* †. And when, agreeably to the prediction of prophecy, and at the end of the appointed course of years, it pleased God to turn back the captivity of his people, and to restore them to their natal soil, *then was their mouth filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing* ‡.

Whatever some mistaken individuals may aver, the religion of Jesus does, certainly, not inculcate the absorption of this virtue, in that wider duty of universal benevolence which it has taught. We know that the Author of that religion himself, first addressed his warnings to his own countrymen: *he came unto his own* §;

* Psalm cxxxvii.

† Daniel, vi. 10.

‡ Psalm cxxvi. 2.

§ John, i. 11.

he was sent primarily to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. A foresight of the calamities which were speedily about to befall the metropolis of his unhappy country, extorted from him the following pathetic apostrophe: *O! Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thee as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not†!* In like manner, on the eve of his crucifixion, it is written, that he saw the city, and wept over it; and said, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace:—but now they are hid from thine eyes‡.* Nor can it with reason be pretended, that these instances of patriotism, exhibited by the chosen people, under the law, and by the sacred Personage who introduced among men a better hope and a purer morality, are undeserving of being received as amounting to a direct injunction. It is surely something more than a doubtful argument, in favour of any particular branch of duty, that Scripture represents it as a legitimate feeling, which we are no where commanded to suppress; and to which its highest patterns of piety, of wisdom, and of worth, have given an unlimited indulgence.

* Matt. xv. 24.

† Luke, xiii. 34.

‡ Luke, xix. 42.

The duty of Patriotism then being recommended and enjoined by these illustrious examples, it is proper to inquire (and the inquiry will not be unsuitable to a day of national humiliation and repentance, as well as to the present state of our country), what is the nature, and what the extent, of those services, which Christianity permits or demands, in our discharge of this important obligation.

I. *Obedience to the laws of our country, and submission to its constituted authorities*, are prime ingredients in the virtue under consideration. Without law, confusion would prevail: wickedness would be unrestrained, crimes unpunished, property endangered, and life insecure. Civil magistrates, and the other *powers that be* in any state, are appointed *for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of them that do well**. Now, one useful service by which we may evince our love to the community in which we dwell, is, that of quietly moving in our respective stations; complying with these laws, and contributing our share towards a general submission to these authorities: for laws are acknowledged to derive much weight from that countenance of public opinion, to which the subscription of each individual is of importance; and it is by the peaceable submission of

* 1 Pet. ii. 14.

the great body of the governed, that the authority of the magistrate over the refractory is the most effectually recognised and maintained*.

This quiet and voluntary subjection to the laws and magistracy, is opposed, not to that bold resistance, which extraordinary emergencies, or extreme oppression, have been by many regarded as justifying; but to that turbulent and murmuring spirit displayed by those who are studious, on every ordinary occasion, to oppose the course of law, and to clog the wheels of public administration: a spirit which the Scriptures seem to have in view, when they command

* *Opinione, piu efficace della forza medesima.*

BECCARIA.

On this head we might further observe, that it is more conducive to the peace of a community, that crimes should not exist, than that they should prevail and be punished. A state is happier as the occasions of enforcing penal laws are less frequent. That man, then, discharges no inconsiderable office of Patriotism, who takes care, by giving no offence, that the law shall not be driven to any painful exertion of its severity, on HIS account.

In the foregoing observations, the author anxiously deprecates being considered as entering on the general question of submission in every supposable case, whatever may happen to be the established laws and authorities. Let it be remembered that he is addressing a free and happy people who enjoy the blessing of a magistracy subservient to law; and whose laws are their own voice (through the medium of their deputed Representatives), imposing restraints upon themselves.

us to *submit ourselves to every ORDINANCE of man, for the Lord's sake**: when they enjoin every soul to be subject unto the higher powers: since the powers that be are ordained of God; and since *whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God*: when they add, *Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake* †: and forcibly describe the evil disposition which a spirit of insubordination indicates, by identifying persons who *despise government* ‡, with those who *walk after the flesh* §.

II. In some states, the duty of Patriotism has been regarded as almost solely confined to *military service*. And, no doubt, in times like those in which we live, to enlist ourselves in the bands that are voluntarily embodied for internal security and defence, to sacrifice a portion of our time and comforts to the necessary exercise which the discipline of those bands prescribes;—to be willing and prompt, at any warning, to encounter with them the inclemency of seasons and the hardships of service;—to resolve, if our inveterate foe should ever set his foot upon our shores, on hazarding our lives in an attempt to repel him;—are constituent parts of Christian Patriotism, too important and indispensable to be omitted. I repeat

* 1 Pet. ii.

† Rom. xiii.

‡ 2 Pet. x.

§ Jude, viii.

the words, CHRISTIAN Patriotism: for as the Gospel of general philanthropy does by no means aim at extinguishing the love of our country, neither does the Gospel of Peace prohibit the profession and the use of arms. The soldiers who inquired of the forerunner of our Lord, what they should do to escape from the wrath to come, were directed, not to abandon their calling, but to continue in it, content with their wages*. And Cornelius, the Gentile convert of Peter, whose prayers and alms had called down an instructing angel from above, is mentioned as *a devout man*, although he was a Centurion, or captain of an hundred soldiers †.

III. Military service, however, occupies a very limited and subordinate place amongst the various methods by which a love of our country may be signalized. If the case were otherwise, the sex, the age, the profession of many citizens, would exempt them from the obligation, or exclude them from the pleasure, of participating in the discharge of this interesting duty. The rendering of *pecuniary support to our country*, by voluntary benevolence if our circumstances permit, or at least by a cheerful and honest submission to all such public burdens as fall to our share, is an exertion of Patriotism,

* Luke, iii. 14.

† Acts, x. 7.

much more comprehensive in regard to the classes of citizens of whom it is demanded. Never let narrowed private finances, or the hardships of a particular juncture, prevail with us, during seasons of warfare, to clamour for premature pacification; if sober and unbiassed reason convince us, that such an event would purchase momentary relief, and hazard eventual ruin;—would prove a short and deceitful calm, preparatory to a more dreadful storm;—that it would betray our countrymen into a false security, which would only render them a more easy and certain prey to a watchful and unprincipled foe;—in this manner lulling them in the lap of a Dalilah *, that the seven locks in which their strength consisted, might be shaven away during their inglorious slumber. Rather, on such an occasion, let us bear those ills we have, than fly to others that we know not of:—let us patiently endure, and honestly share, the taxations imposed by Government, as the means of preserving us from heavier evils:—and that we may endure them the more easily, as well as avoid temptation to any unfaithfulness in payment, let us virtuously resolve to retrench our luxuries, and to subject ourselves to voluntary privations. And surely, while the sad account of the famine, the fatigue, the complicated sufferings, recently † sustained by our military com-

* Judges, xvi. 18.

† After the retreat to Corunna.

patriots, in a long and harassing retreat, with all that patience, fortitude, perseverance, and determined valour, which are answerable to their character,—while this is yet fresh in our memories; (distresses and calamities unquestionably endured by them for the sake of their country,—inasmuch as they have been engaged, as at another Thermopylæ, in intimidating the menacers of invasion;)—it cannot be deemed unreasonable to demand, that we, who sit at home at our ease, should, in the same cause, undergo the inferior evils incurred by a conscientious temporary contraction of our superfluous expenses and enjoyments.

An attention to the present circumstances of the country, has led me to confine myself thus far to a recommendation of submission to those *unusual* public burdens, which are incidental to a season of hostility. It is proper to add, that for conducting the affairs of a great empire, for rewarding its public officers, for supporting its courts of justice (in which the judges must necessarily be remunerated out of the public purse, that they may stand above temptation to be biassed by private corruption); for maintaining such troops as are, at all seasons, requisite to the preservation of internal tranquillity; and, finally, for discharging the interest and principal of the public debt; taxation

to a certain amount may be always expected by us, even in times of peace. Hence our Saviour and his Apostles, in establishing the willing and honourable payment of tribute, as a Christian duty, have delivered the authoritative precepts which recommend it, as applicable on all occasions. *Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's*, was the reply of Jesus to those who questioned him on the lawfulness of paying public assessments: and although, as the Son of God, himself exempt from tribute, *Notwithstanding* (said he to Peter), *lest we offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and opening the mouth of the first fish that cometh up, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for thee and me**. To the same effect are the admonitions of St. Paul: *For this cause, that is, for conscience sake, pay ye tribute also: for they who demand it are God's ministers, attending continually on this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour †*.

It will further be considered by the Christian patriot, that the payment of public taxes is, like any other debt, an act of ordinary justice. It is a debt due from every citizen, to the state, for the protection of his person and

* Matt. xvii. 27.

† Rom. xiii. 6, 7.

property. The servant of God, then, who studies *to walk HONESTLY as in the day**, will scorn and dread to withhold his lawful proportion of it by any evasion or concealment; he will satisfy the demands of the PUBLIC CREDITOR, as conscientiously as he endeavours to fulfil his engagements with any merchant or tradesman, who has supplied his private wants. Nay, he will regard the honourable payment of tribute, as a duty of charity as well as of justice. He will reflect, that whatever is culpably withheld must necessarily create some defalcation in the public revenue: a defalcation which, were it ever so little, must be supplied by an additional assessment levied on those citizens who render their tribute with *integrity*. Consequently, he will not cast on these, his brethren and fellow-labourers, a larger share of the common burden than, in strict equity, belongs to them; because it is his principle, *not to do unto others, that which he would not wish that they should do unto him* †.

IV. A patriotic service, in which all ranks and conditions are capable of concurring, and ought to concur, is *the offering of supplications* at the throne of Almighty God, for the preservation and welfare of their native land. We may remark, however, that since it is the exclusive

* Rom. xiii. 13.

† Matt. vii. 12.

province of men, engaged in secular pursuits, to arm and to act, this latter contribution to the welfare of the body politic is peculiarly (though by no means exclusively) incumbent on the Ministry, on the softer sex, on old age, and on childhood. Accordingly, in a fast mentioned by the Prophet Joel, we find the following injunctions prescribed: *Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast: assemble the ELDERS: gather the CHILDREN and them that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth out of his chamber, and THE BRIDE out of her closet: let THE PRIESTS, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord! and give not thine heritage to reproach**.

Thus, in seasons of public humiliation, or public danger, ought persons of every age, and sex, and profession, but more particularly those to whom we have above alluded, *pray for the peace of their Jerusalem*†. To-day we are called upon (but, I trust, my fellow-worshippers, we shall likewise remember in our usual supplications) to make entreaty for the success of our arms by land and sea;—for abundant harvests, which may mitigate the evils of war;—for that wisdom and virtue in the national councils, which may steer us in safety through the storm;—for internal

* Joel, ii. 15, 16, 17.

† Psalm cxxii. 6.

union; for national prosperity. It is not from our own strength or exertions, but only from the favour of Providence, that these blessings are to be expected: for we know that *every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights* *. Humbly, and without harbouring a spirit of unchristian rancour, we must further request, that it may please Almighty God to abate the pride, to appease the malice, and to confound the devices, of our enemies. We are to entreat him to withhold, from any shortsighted wishes which we may form, a rash and destructive peace; as well as speedily to bestow on us the blessing of a peace that is honourable, secure, and lasting. Above all, it is our bounden duty to deplore our private and national offences; and to deprecate, through the intercession of our blessed Redeemer, the wrath of God, which they have too justly merited.

V. This leads me to a consideration of the last service which I shall mention, as a component part of Christian Patriotism: I allude to a *general and comprehensive repentance, a conversion from the heart of unbelief, and from all dead works, to be effected for the sake of our country*, in addition to the many higher motives by which this change of disposition and conduct is recommended.

* James, i. 17.

Our prayers, we may rest assured, whether public or secret, will find no access to the favour of God, unless they be accompanied with corresponding resolutions and exertions, sincere, strenuous, and dependant on divine grace. *Is not this the fast* (saith God) *that I have chosen; to loose the bands of wickedness; to undo the heavy burdens; to let the oppressed go free; to deal thy bread to the hungry; to bring the poor to thy house; to cover the naked when thou seest him; and not to hide thyself from thine own flesh? Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer: then shalt thou cry, and he shall say, Here I am*.*

We have, moreover, scriptural examples to prove, that repentance and obedience possess no inconsiderable influence, through the great Mediator, in prevailing with the Deity to spare cities, which by their wickedness had incurred his displeasure. *Within forty days shall Nineveh be destroyed*, was the awful warning of the Prophet Jonah: but the Ninevites repented, and the threat was revoked †.—*O! my Lord*, said Abraham to the Almighty, when he came to destroy the sinful city of the plain, *O! my Lord, peradventure ten righteous persons shall be found there: and God said, I will not destroy it, for ten's sake ‡.*

* Isaiah, lviii. 6, 7, 9.

† Jonah, iii. 4. 10.

‡ Gen. xviii. 32.

In this country, we have reason to believe, and to be thankful, the number of the penitent and righteous is incalculably greater: but it is proper to recollect, that that light of the Gospel hath shone upon us, which, if Sodom and Gomorrah had been blessed in beholding it, would have induced them to repent in sackcloth and ashes. Our advantages and means of improvement are more numerous and ample: and from those unto whom more has been given, more, doubtless, will proportionably be demanded*. What number of humbled and regenerated Patriots the Almighty may require, to induce him, under a higher intercession, to spare the British empire, it is true, we have no revelation which informs us. Let it suffice to know that military prowess and political wisdom are not the only means by which we may aspire, to assist in averting the destruction of our country. Not to those only, whose names stand conspicuous in the annals of history; who engage universal attention; whose funerals are celebrated with the pomp of sorrow; and to whose memory the monuments and cenotaphs of public gratitude are *justly* reared;—not to these exclusively belongs the title of general benefactors.—Fully as serviceable,—probably in the eye of God MORE serviceable to the community,—may be that lowly and obscure individual, who, while his name

* Luke, xii. 48.

was never heard beyond his cottage circle or his village spire, while he has no power of displaying, in the eyes of men, the warmth of his wishes for the general safety, contributes to the national treasury his two mites, of a timely, silent, secret, unnoticed repentance:—and thus co-operates in a good labour with other penitents, perhaps lowly and obscure as himself, but, although scattered over all the land, capable of combining for its deliverance, and although probably unknown to each other as to the world, enabled to make separate offerings of contrition and amendment, which all arising from different and distant places, may gather into a cloud of moral incense, of a sweet-smelling savour before God. Thus it is not impossible, that a retired, domesticated woman, a feeble youth, an unlettered peasant, an abject outcast, may be an individual, whose reformation (if we may presume to state the supposition, and to use the bold expression) the Deity will regard as a completion of that number of converted and believing servants, on account of whom he will withdraw his outstretched arm of vengeance, and convey peace to the walls and palaces of their Jerusalem. *Shall I not spare Nineveh, that great city?—I will not destroy it for the ninety and nine's sake.* And what though it be not theirs to display valour in splendid achievements, and inscribe their names on the

trophies of conquest:—what though their lot forbids that they shall be celebrated in the song of victory amongst the heroes, who have overwhelmed the fleets of the enemy in the deep, or pushed their own vessels on the hostile strand:—who have moved over a bridge of mingled foes and comrades; rushed up the steep to the open sepulchres of engines of destruction;—and in watchings and famine, in perils by land and perils by the waters*, have purchased glory to themselves, and security to their fellow-citizens!

These are, indeed, exploits of daring and generosity, demanding public and permanent acknowledgment: and far be it from our wishes to tear a laurel from the brows of any who have performed them. But let us not place the passing splendours of the present world on a level with the glory of an inheritance which fadeth not away. Will it not be more honourable for the Christian penitent to be mentioned in the book of life, as one of those, who having, under the influence of divine grace, swelled the number of the faithful in Jesus, became the hidden agents of Divine Providence in saving their empire from devastation and ruin, in conveying tranquillity to its hearths, and protection to its altars?

* 2 Cor. xi. 26.

But I correct myself:—the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus have learned from him an humility which forbids them to covet *personal* distinctions, even in a place of happiness. If *they* seek for palms, it is but to cast them before the throne of the Most High, and to say, *Not unto us, O God! not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise* *.

Having thus run over the most essential services, comprehended under the duty of loving our country, I shall hasten to close my discourse with a statement of several motives, by which this duty, as it is viewed by the religion of Jesus, and these services, are recommended.

1. As I have already, in the former part of this address, laid before you, at sufficient length, the scriptural precepts or examples which are connected either with the general subject, or with its different branches, I shall not now detain you by recurring to that first and most cogent inducement, to the practice of the virtue under contemplation. You will remember, that to recommend the duty of Patriotism, the general consent of nations, the practice of the Jewish people, and the example of our Lord and pattern, have been adduced: while, in following that duty through its several details, every argu-

* Psalm cxv. 1.

ment has been reinforced by the mandates and authorities of the word of truth. Since then we possess motives for loving our country, with which the Heathens were wholly unacquainted, let us carry the duty to a more exalted pitch than their codes of law or rules of virtue prescribed. Since our patriotism is kindled at the altar of the sanctuary, let it burn with a brighter and a purer flame, than Pagan antiquity ever boasted or beheld. But I now proceed to observe, in the second place,

2. That to cultivate this duty, in the manner here recommended, is to afford the most ample scope and the most exalted gratification to a powerful natural impulse. It is natural to all men to love their country, merely because it is their country, and without any reference to its peculiar advantages*. In every region throughout the globe, however barren, and however bleak; however tyrannous the government or miserable the people, this generous instinct is found to prevail. And it has even been remarked, that by a wise law of nature, willing, as it would seem, that population should be distributed in all quarters and districts of our earth alike, the poorer the soil, the stronger is usually the attachment to it. None are con-

* *Nescio quâ natale solum dulcedine captos*

Ducit.—OVID. ex Ponto, lib. i. epist. 3. ver. 35.

scious of a warmer affection for their first abodes, than the inhabitants of inhospitable mountains. The Highlander of Scotland and the peasant of Switzerland cannot be naturalized in the kindest climates: when far from home, they sicken in the midst of delights, and pine for their native wilds*.

* Of the latter it has been thus justly and beautifully observed by "*certain of our poets*:"

“ Dear is that shed to which his soul conforms,
 “ And dear that hill which lifts him from the storms;
 “ And as a child, when scaring sounds molest,
 “ Clings close and closer to the mother’s breast,
 “ So the loud torrent, and the whirlwind’s roar,
 “ But bind him to his native mountains more.”

The celebrated Rans de Vaches is a little air by which the inhabitants of Switzerland are so strongly affected, and when in foreign lands filled with so anxious a desire to return to their country, that in France, before the Revolution, it was not permitted to be played or sung on pain of death.

“ When the Swiss soldiers chanced at any time to hear it, they would express their sensibility by sighs and tears, and would not unfrequently desert in the impulse of the moment: and such as showed silent dejection, and scorned so base a procedure, fell martyrs to their own feelings by a disease, called by medical writers Nostalgia.”—THORNTON’S Medical Extracts, vol. iii. p. 255.

Nostalgia is thus defined by Mr. Townsend in his Therapeutics:

“ Impatience when absent from one’s native home, and vehement desire to return, attended by melancholy, loss of appetite, and want of sleep.—This disease,” says he, “ is

When, indeed, we reflect, by what a variety of ties men are, in all lands, bound to the place of their nativity, we cannot feel at all surprised that an attachment to it should be not only universally prevalent, but vigorous and glowing: for when men think or speak of their country, they think or speak of wives, parents, children, friends, kindred; they sum up in that one idea, the land where first their tongues were taught

equally familiar to the Swiss and to the peasants of the Asturias, who have quitted their native MOUNTAINS, and in many cases has proved fatal."

The following case of a WELSH recruit is recorded by Dr. Hamilton of Ipswich, A. D. 1781 :

" This young man was of a gloomy countenance, and complained of weakness. His pulse was frequent and small: he had little appetite; his sleep was disturbed by starting; he was atrophic, and his strength was so much reduced, that he could not leave his bed; yet he had no pain, no thirst, no cough. Neither wine, cordial stimulants, nor other tonics, had the least effect, for his pulse daily became quicker and smaller.

" Evening exacerbations, and morning sweats, succeeded; his nails became incurvated, and the tunica adnata of his eyes pellucid, attended by debility and emaciation in the extreme.

" In this situation, his sagacious physician obtained from the commanding officer, and communicated to his patient, a promise of a furlough for six weeks. On this promise his appetite and strength returned, in a few days he was able to sit up, and in two months he left the hospital, being then perfectly recovered."

to utter their Maker's praise, and their eyes to know the authors of their being* ; the field of their boyish sports ; the school of their opening understandings ; the scene of their manly occupations ; the sacred soil of all their friendships, sympathies, and duties ; the spot where those whom they esteem, reside, and those whom they have venerated, sleep ; where they hope to grow old in respected toil, in the service of God and their neighbour ; to repose (if God do spare them) every man under his own vine and fig-tree, in the evening of life, after having borne the heat and burden of the day ; and to be laid with their fathers and kindred at the last. What wonder that a term connected with so many endearing associations should kindle, in the coldest bosom, all the feelings of the most ardent attachment ;—that it should readily incline the selfish to liberality, the sluggish to exertion, the prodigal to a cheerful self-denial, the soft and voluptuous to determined hardship ; and all to rise up with one hand and heart in an indignant effort to repel the ingression of an invader ! What wonder that the concourse and union of all these asso-

* “Cari sunt parentes, cari liberi, propinqui, familiares : sed omnis omnium caritates patria una complexa est.”

CICERO de Offic. lib. i. § 17.

“Ὁ εἶδεν γλῦκισιν ἧς πατρίδος, εἶδὲ τοκήων.

HOMER, Odyss. lib. ix. lin. 34.

ciations should even countervail the evils of the worst climates and the worst governments; and urge men, though battered by tempests, and crushed by oppression, to say of their native land, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces; if not for the mildness of thy seasons, if not for the lenience of thy rule—at least for my brethren and companions' sake I will now say, Peace be within thee: yea, because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good."

Cultivate then, through all its branches, a duty, with which the compliance, far from imposing restraint, is no more than the act of self-resignation to a delightful impulse of nature. When you subject this impulse to the holy sway of Christianity, you give it a sober, wise, and useful direction; you strengthen all the obligations imposed by it; and add several highly interesting and important services, which would not have presented themselves in a worldly view, to the details of obedience which it comprehends. From a passion too you convert it into a virtue; and add the satisfaction of obeying it to the other pleasures of an approving conscience.

3. But however strong this attachment may be found, in the breasts of mankind at large, it

is, or ought to be, more than commonly vigorous, and productive of active exertion, in those of us, Britons: for there it is something more than an instinct, or a feeling inspired by naturalities and general associations. It is an affection for an object whose qualities are avowedly pre-eminent; and the coldest calculation of prudence and interest, as well as the dictates of Christianity and the impulse of natural feeling, must prompt the discharge of the duties arising from it. When **WE**, my fellow-citizens, make mention of our country, we make honourable mention (not only of those objects of attachment which we possess in common with our whole race, but moreover) of a temperate climate and a land abundant in all the necessaries of life; of a free constitution; of civil liberty; of wise and beneficial laws. We concentrate in the expression, the impartial administration of justice; trial by a jury of equals; exemption from arbitrary imprisonment; security of property; protection of life and character. We include in the phrase, the liberty of the press: we include liberty of conscience; the freedom enjoyed by each individual of worshipping his Maker, unmolested, in the way he prefers: so that every man of every sect may, on this day, say to Britain, in the words of the text, *Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good.*

You too, my poorer brethren, have, in the country in which it is your lot, your happiness, to have been born, and to dwell, peculiar reasons for an extraordinary patriotism. Whenever you call to mind your native land, you think of a land, in which employments are more various, wages more liberal, industry better protected, opportunities of rising in life, and of possessing its comforts, more numerous, than in any other. You recollect the Bibles which you have in your hands; the Gospel which is made plain to you; the good sense, the information, the title to regard, which characterize you above the poor of other nations; all proceeding from the consideration you are held in, by that valuable constitution under which you are protected. You summon to your remembrance your voice and influence, in the election of the Legislators of your country. You bring under your consideration a system of poor-laws, which (however deeply their extent may be regretted by some) you at least have reason to contemplate with respect, as a provision for unsuccessful industry, deserted childhood, and forlorn old age. You cause to pass before your view a long list of infirmaries, asylums, almshouses, hospitals, charity-schools; funds for the sick, the destitute, the stranger, the insolvent debtor (and you very well know with how many other names I might swell this catalogue):—this is

Britain ;—this is your country. I ask you, to cast your eyes over all the kingdoms of the world, and to tell me where there is any thing *like* such a provision for the comfort, the security, the health, the education, the morals,—in one word, for the HAPPINESS of the inferior classes. It would be but mockery to ask you whether you discover a resemblance to it in any of those countries, which they who threaten to invade your territory have overrun. In these, indeed, you behold a dreadful and deplorable contrast to it. Remember then, that what you see there, is what you have to expect here, if *you* too do not say to your Jerusalem, to your country, by giving her the warmest of your good wishes, and the most strenuous of your active exertions, *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.*

To draw towards a conclusion:—While all these considerations should powerfully induce us to love our native land, and to offer to it the various services of civil and military obedience, of fidelity in the payment of tribute, of prayer, and of repentance,—we ought not, at any time, to forget that we are disciples of that Gospel, whose chief ornament and jewel is charity; and as such, bound, while we reserve our patriotism, not to overlook the still more imperious, though not incompatible, duty of uni-

versal benevolence. The most enlightened nations of antiquity pushed their patriotism to an illiberal extent: they excluded foreigners from ANY share in their affections; they termed all nations, except their own, barbarians; and they treated them as they termed them. Their national animosities were not less violent than their patriotic attachments: they were as inveterate in hating their enemies, as impassioned in loving their fellow-citizens. And a regard for truth compels us to add, that a portion of this narrow spirit seems to have been an ingredient in that Jewish ignorance which God winked at, until the fulness of times should arrive*.

Our blessed Saviour came into the world, to manifest his equal love for all mankind; and to recommend to them (not the same, for that would be impracticable, but) a similar philanthropy. The rule laid down in the Gospel has respect to our condition, as beings living in the midst of wickedness and injustice, and permitted to exert *some* efforts of defence and resistance; since without these, our life would be a state of oppression and misery, which a merciful God could not design to be endured by his servants in return for their fidelity. The precepts enjoining peace are accordingly, all of them, qualified

* Acts, xvii. 30.

with reference to this condition. *If it be possible, and as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men* *.

The defence of our country, then, against public hostility, is as allowable as the defence of our property against private robbery. And when it is considered, that all the signal actions, either by sea or land, which have of late years adorned the pages of our history, may be regarded as defensive; however we may deplore the fates of the fallen, with whatever lamentation we may consecrate the memories of an Abercrombie, a Nelson, and a Moore; we can no more condemn as Christians, than we can grudge as Britons, the blood which they have poured out for our security. Yet we must not stretch, even in our ideas, the animosities, or the inflictions of warfare, further than is necessary for defence. Our most relentless enemies have a claim upon our good offices. *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.* I desire, my brethren, to leave this maxim upon your minds, as applicable, not only to your private differences, but to your behaviour or sentiments with regard to all those, with whom you may at any time be engaged in war. Pray for their repentance; and, as far

* Rom. xii. 18.

as is consistent with self-preservation, contribute to their welfare.

Thus far may you be citizens of the world: for be assured, that any who bid you assume that character, and stifle within your breasts *all* predilection whatever for your own land, are wild enthusiasts, or, perhaps, partizans of your enemies. But to the extent which we have delineated, it is quite consistent with, nay, it is a part of a Christian love of your country, to regard all mankind as compatriots of the Jerusalem which is above. And to this extent, as disciples of Christ, you may rightly say unto them, your fellow-disciples, *Because of the house of the Lord, our common God, I will seek to do you good.*

Finally:—In fulfilling our patriotic duties, let us ever anxiously beware of a spirit of worldly-mindedness;—of an immoderate attachment to our political advantages;—or indeed to ANY advantages of the present transitory scene. While guarding and appreciating, as we ought, our birthright of national freedom, be it our chief care to secure our adoption as the sons of God, and *to stand fast in that better liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free.* Let our affections be MAINLY FIXED on that eternal home, which is, properly speaking, THE COUNTRY of Christian

worshippers. Let us ever strive to conduct ourselves in the world as not forgetful that we have a more glorious fellow-citizenship with the saints on high; as conscious that on the earth we are but strangers and pilgrims, on whom it is incumbent to do all with a continual reference to the Canaan, whither we are going; as considering, in a word, “that we have here no continuing city,” or country, “but that we seek one to come*.”

* Heb. xiii. 14,

S E R M O N V.

ON A DEFECTIVE SERVICE OF GOD.

ST. LUKE, CHAP. XVIII. PART OF VERSE 22.

Yet lackest thou one thing.

THE Gospel, in tendering salvation to mankind, has distinctly specified and stipulated certain conditions, which it is necessary that all those should strictly fulfil, who seek to obtain that inestimable gift. Whatever, therefore, falls short of compliance with this stipulation, must needs be an idle beating of the air; or, at best, can afford no assurance, no reasonable hope, of its conduciveness to everlasting happiness. And wherever there are any, (may it not be too justly feared, that in most assemblies of nominal Christians there are not a few?) who content themselves with such defective service, it becomes the indispensable, however unwelcome, office of their public instructor, to disturb them amidst the slumber of their false security, by taking up his parable, and repeating in their ears the doctrine contained in the few significant words, *Yet lackest thou one thing.*

This delicate but keen rebuke was addressed by our blessed Saviour to a certain ruler, who had come to him under pretence of making an anxious inquiry after the true method of obtaining eternal life; but really (as appeared in the sequel) for the purpose of making a vain boast of his personal attainments in righteousness; in this manner evidently depreciating, by implication, the Gospel scheme of atonement.

I propose, however, for the present, to dismiss from attention the particular circumstances related in the context, and embracing the subject in a more enlarged view, to apply it to the spiritual condition and expectations of various large classes of professing Christians.

1. I may commence with propriety by addressing the admonition, *Yet lack ye one thing*, to those who establish their hopes of admission into the Gospel covenant, on religious observances, independently of moral obedience. From the earliest appearance of Christianity, indeed, professors of it have unfortunately never been wanting, though their numbers, in these latter times, we trust, are much reduced, who have perverted its genuine spirit, by affirming, that as it abolished the works of the CEREMONIAL law, it superseded no less the ancient necessity of yielding strict compliance to the dictates of

the moral code. Resting on the great doctrine of Justification by Faith, they have misrepresented, or misunderstood, the real nature of this principle, which they have treated as a naked assent to the truths of the Gospel, sufficiently efficacious on the part of man, for the ensurance of everlasting salvation. In considering, and considering rightly, that *without faith it is impossible to please God**, they have forgotten, that *without holiness no man shall behold him †*.

To oppose this erroneous and destructive notion, which appeared to derive some slight plausibility from several misconstrued expressions employed by St. Paul, the Apostle James wrote his General Epistle. Not in any degree denying the efficacy of Faith, he shows, that *Faith without works is dead*; and decidedly prefers the believer who evinces his faith by his works, to him who places his reliance on a barren belief, unaccompanied by its proper and natural fruits of holiness.

But this separation of principle from moral practice may assume a much more subtle and imposing form, than that of restricting obedience to an exclusive assent to the evidence of scriptural facts. A man may be very ardent in

* Heb. xi. 6.

† Heb. xii. 14.

his devout affections ; impressing his brethren, and even himself, with the persuasion, that he loves Almighty God with all his heart and mind :—he may be frequent, regular, and earnest in prayer ; strict in his attendance on public worship ; an habitual communicant ; attentive to the duties of family devotion ; diligent in the daily search of the Scriptures ; and thoroughly versed in theological knowledge :—we shall admit, that there are even several moral services, naturally growing out of these religious habits, which our worshipper may carry to an exemplary height ; his lips may never be polluted by a profane expression, and he may order his general conversation and deportment with the most rigid decorum and gravity.

In all this the disciple of revealed religion does what he ought to do ; he is what he ought to be ; and God forbid that, in sketching the dark side of his character, we should be considered as sanctioning the ridicule or opprobrium of libertinism, when directed against these its brighter lineaments. Yet, as we frequently observe an individual, such as has been here described, deficient in some essential points of the second table ; altogether forgetful, let us say, for example, of humility, of forgiveness, of charitable conversation ; too little conscientious

In respect of strict veracity, of reasonable self-denial, and of affections weaned from the world; we should be failing in that fidelity and sincere love, which rightly divides to all the word of truth, and distributes spiritual counsel according to the necessities of each, if we neglected to apply unto this partial follower of Christ the important warning—*Yet lackest thou one thing*; to undeceive him in his fond opinion, that a performance of religious services, however earnest, may relax, though but slightly, ANY part of his obligation, to discharge his ordinary active duties towards his brethren. It would be venturing, as we shall soon find, too bold a statement, to allege, with some, that the sole and ultimate object of ALL religion is moral practice; and that belief and devotion are only valuable by their conduciveness to that effect. Beyond question, compliance with the injunctions of the first table, is abstractedly a duty of itself. Moral righteousness, however, not less assuredly, as it is the natural result, and the least fallible test, of fervent and sincere piety, must be regarded as the *chief* end proposed by the Deity, in inculcating the necessity of devout affections, of faith, and of religious observances. *If ye love me, keep my commandments**:—*Charity* is pronounced to be *the end of the commandment* †: and we are reminded, that

* John, xiv. 23.

† 1 Tim. i. 5.

*if we know these things, happy are we if we do them**. Nor will a deliberate deficiency, in but one branch of active duty, be compensated in the sight of God by even the strictest observance of all our other moral obligations. If thou yet lackest one service,—if in keeping, generally, the moral law, thou shalt boldly assume the latitude of offending in only a single point,—though not perhaps far from the kingdom of Heaven, thou art as little an inhabitant of it as those who dwell at a greater distance. We are to follow our Lord fully, in faith and in morality,—in mercy and in justice,—in little and in great commandments,—in the wilderness of self-denial not less than in the smooth way of the pleasant virtues.

2. But if Faith and Devotion, separated from comprehensive morality, be, as we have thus endeavoured to show, imperfect and unavailing, with no less severity ought we next to condemn, with no less anxiety to avoid, an opposite defect—Belief and Morality, independent of Religious Service.

They who disclaim and despise all piety, imagining their whole duty, as Christian disciples, to be comprised in faith and in moral obedience, can entertain no reasonable and well-grounded

* John, xiii. 17.

hopes of attaining eternal happiness. For man has no positive assurance of a future state, excepting that alone conveyed in the Gospel: and the Gospel promises its everlasting bliss to those only, who, in addition to the duties which they owe to their neighbour, shall be found to have loved God with *all their hearts*; and to have manifested their love of him by prayer and praise, by keeping his sabbaths, and reverencing his sanctuary. Exercises of devotion, indeed, are necessary to perfect—necessary to PRODUCE Christian morality. Of ourselves we are insufficient even to *think*, much more insufficient then to *do*, *ought that is good**. Our sufficiency is of God; *without whom we can do nothing* †. And that prayer is the appointed method of obtaining his assistance, we have learned from the lips of our Divine Master: *Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you* ‡. Any man, therefore, who flatters himself with hopes of salvation, on the ground of a belief producing Christian holiness, to the exclusion of Christian devotion, would be incapable of realizing his pretensions to holiness, even if in an union with a faithful assent to the Christian doctrines, it were sufficient for the attainment of the salvation expected: he would be incapable, I say, without devout exercises, of becoming,

* 2 Cor. iii. 5.

† John, xv. 5.

‡ Matt. vii. 3.

in any degree, holy, as his Father is holy; because grace is necessary to holiness, and devout exercises are the means of grace. Thus as faith detached from morality, is a tree producing no fruits; so is that morality which excludes religious service, to be regarded as a bough torn away from its trunk, which quickly withers through lack of nourishment and life. But, after all, even to speak of Christian morality, or holiness, independently of the offices of devotion, is inaccurate, and involves a contradiction: for holiness is the fulfilling of the preceptive law; and no man can ever be affirmed to have fulfilled it, who has presumptuously neglected any one of the important precepts—*Pray without ceasing* * :—*Forget not your assembling together* † :—*Let a man examine himself* ‡ :—*Search the Scriptures* § :—*This do in remembrance of me* ||.

3. Let us now, my friends, in the third place, direct our attention to another large class in the Christian community, composed of those persons who, professing to admire, and to practise, the Gospel morality, do indeed combine it with a species of religion; but not with that entire and pure religion which is revealed and prescribed in the word of truth. In principle

* 1 Thess. v. 17.

† Heb. x. 25.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 28.

§ John, v. 39.

|| 1 Cor. xi. 25.

they hold tenets not in many respects superior to the creed of natural religion. They believe in one God; in a superintending Providence; and in a future state of recompense and punishment. They are, moreover, impressed with a deep and just conviction as to the propriety and efficacy of prayer. They see and own the importance of public worship to the community; and will sanction it with their presence for the sake, as they avow, of maintaining decency, and of affording a right example. They will then lay their hands upon the sacred volume, of which they very highly approve, in so far as they discover it to coincide with principles which they deem thus reasonable, and to inculcate maxims and conduct thus salutary. Of the excellence of the Christian precepts, they speak with unbounded admiration: and while they propose (it is, in this place, needless to dispute their sincerity) an adoption of these rules as the guides of *their own* practice, they cease not to recommend them to their children, to their domestics, and to all within the sphere of their influence or persuasion. But having gone thus far, their orthodoxy unhappily stops short. In leaving it to zealots to contend for modes of faith—in resting their belief on a poetical persuasion, that “he cannot err whose life is in the right”—in holding the language, “I worship as my fathers did; I heed not the

vain disputes of theology, and pretend to draw no nice distinctions; endeavouring to follow out what is plain and practicable in the Bible, not puzzling myself with matters that are difficult and perplexed, and believing, in short, that every honest man, no matter what his creed, will find admittance into heaven;”—in all this, there is a false appearance of manliness, liberality, and superiority to bigoted notions, with which they are highly fascinated. Thus disciplined, such characters rank themselves under the banners of Jesus; they profess and call themselves Christians; and they look forward to their possession of the rewards proposed by the Gospel, with a confidence and security which has never once harboured the faintest notion of the possibility of disappointment.

Now, strongly as this case has here been stated (and I suspect I have been drawing a portrait, in the contemplation of which no small number of my hearers will recognise their own resemblance), the word of God most amply warrants me in declaring to any one whom it shall happen to resemble—*All this is not enough: thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting;—yet lackest thou one thing.*

It is important to remark, that the nominal Christians alluded to, treat with the most con-

temptuous disregard and disrespect whatever the sacred volume recommends to their assent, which in any degree baffles the comprehension of human reason, or soars above the region of ordinary experience. Whatever points bear even the slightest appearance of mystery,—the voice of inspired prediction, and the narratives of miraculous agencies, are either exposed to ridicule, or passed over with a prudent silence, as the excrescences and defects of a system in other respects beautiful; as superstitious fables with which the artifice and credulity of man have debased the pure and genuine revelation of God. To the grand doctrines of the Gospel they are not less inattentive. The insincerity of that external respect, with which, in deference to the popular faith, or, in their own language, to the popular prejudice, they compliment these truths in presence of the multitude, is abundantly manifested by the cold sneer which is cast on them in the secure retreat of the private or convivial circle; and the friend who shall approach sufficiently near them, to ascertain their undisguised sentiments, discovers their whole creed to be briefly summed up in this—that belief in futurity, and correct moral service, is all that is absolutely required at their hands; and that with respect to the arcana of evangelical information, they are superfluities, into the truth or falsehood of which

there is no strict occasion for minutely prying:—opinions which, as established, they will not seek to disturb, but which are, in reality, altogether unfit for men of the world, for men of free thoughts and vigorous understandings. Thus, without a Redeemer, without a supporting Spirit, they look for the benefits of redemption, and make pretensions to an acceptable morality. Doubtless, then, it is an office of importance, and of kindness, to remind them, that that very Scripture from which they derive their scheme of morals, and on the information of which they build up their hopes of futurity—*THAT* Scripture, which must either be altogether rejected, or admitted in all its parts, and with all its information, as we have received it, declares expressly, that *there is none other name given under heaven, whereby we may attain everlasting salvation, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—God and Man**:—and again, that *no man can come into the way of truth, unless the Father, by his Spirit, draw him* †.

Indeed, if they who attempt to tack together their Natural Theology with a Christian's practice and hopes; if these Deists of Revelation (for such, in describing them, is the inconsistency in language to which we are compelled to have recourse) were observed to be very strenuous, or very successful, in yielding obedience to the

* Acts, iv. 12.

† John, vi. 44.

comprehensive precepts of the Gospel; if a belief in the doctrines of revealed religion were not generally necessary, as could easily be proved, to the discharge of such obedience, it might not perhaps be prudent to offer these remonstrances. The case of moral agents so upright and irreproachable, might be left in the hands of God; although, even on this supposition of their approach to excellence, ONE important and interesting virtue at least—that of humility—would be sought for in vain amongst their good qualities:—humility—that pilgrim's garb—that suppliant's aspect—that soft and subdued grace of the Christian character, which arises from the disavowal of personal righteousness, and from recumbence on the Saviour for salvation and for succour. But as we may confidently make an appeal to well-known facts, in affirming that such characters usually fix their standard of attainment at a point exceedingly low; ever claiming allowances for their infirmity and their temptations; and boldly encroaching on the mercy of God, while they still more boldly deny the efficacy of that scheme of redemption which alone elevates his mercy above his justice:—and further, since, even if in theory, their notions, as to what degrees of obedience are sufficient or practicable, were commensurate with the very highest claims of Christianity, Christianity itself, and the voice

of experience, concur in declaring, that man is too depraved to practise, by his own natural strength, a virtue at all worthy of the lowest conceivable degree of everlasting happiness:—these things being so, it is humbly presumed that we offer but a gentle rebuke or caution to any individual who denies the merits of the Saviour, or despises the assistances of grace, in applying to him the address, *Yet lackest thou one thing.*

4. So large a portion of our limited time has been occupied in discussing this important head of discourse, that I am compelled to pass by with a very slight notice, the last description of professing Christians, to whose case the words of the text appear suitable.

We may profess and believe all the articles of the Christian faith; we may endeavour to walk in all the ordinances of God blameless; but although we thus rise in the scale of religious and moral service, and advance nearer to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*, we shall still lack one essential and vital thing, and all this will profit us nought, unless our belief and obedience be found to proceed purely from a heart rightly affected towards God. It is possible for faith to be a cold conviction; for obedience to be a prudential calculation. We may

* Ephes. iv. 13.

be enamoured of godliness, because it is great present gain;—gain in interest, in reputation, in health, and in convenience. And we may be disposed to assent to all the truths of the Gospel, and to reverence its religious appointments, from reflecting, that, in addition to these worldly considerations, the further advantage of securing the life to come is proposed, and not to be rejected. Now all these principles may certainly enter, with propriety, into the motives of a sincere Christian; but they ought to hold a very narrow and subordinate place in his breast. A pure and an earnest love towards God, arising from the contemplation and esteem of his perfections; gratitude for his bounties so richly unfolded, and so profusely scattered, in the several works of creation, of providence, redemption, and grace; zeal to promote his glory, and to walk in every way worthy of the high calling of heirs of his kingdom—these ought to enter into the mass of our religion and duty; to animate them as their grand informing principle, their life, and their soul; and so to pervade the breast, as to leave but little space for worldly and selfish considerations.

This is indeed that offering on which I insist the more anxiously, conscious that it comprehends every other branch of service, on which

I have before expatiated. Let love, gratitude, zeal be settled in the heart, and we shall then think no more of paying to the object of these affections a stinted and defective service, either in our religious or our practical duties. We shall no longer stand, if I may presume so to speak, haggling with the Almighty Father of the universe, trying how closely we may press him in the Covenant; and searching the Scriptures with a view to ascertain how little will suffice to secure us from everlasting ruin—how far it may be safe to tread on forbidden ground—whether, in giving faith, we may reserve a portion of works; or in performing moral duties, we may be regardless of adoration; or in serving God, retain some pride of opinion, or satisfy ourselves with a service raised on worldly views, or on earth-alloyed and doubtful motives. No; we shall then give him, freely and cheerfully, all that he requires, and all that we have: we will give him faith and works, and prayers and alms, and strength and soul, and faculties and affections;—and after we have given him all, think that we have given him too little;—that we can never give him enough;—that we still are, and at the highest practicable elevation of human obedience, that we ever shall continue,—unprofitable servants and insolvent debtors.

Every thing inferior to this surrender of the predilections—this tribute of the heart—this glow of the feelings—this clinging of the attachment—this entire and unreserved and cheerful dedication of the whole man—this salience and ascension of the soul to meet its God and Saviour,—may be worldly wisdom, may be worldly virtue; but it is not the extent of what the Almighty demands; it is not pure religion; it is not genuine Christianity. *My son, give me thy heart* *. But if thou wilt grudge and withhold it, the inference is unavoidable; *Yet lackest thou one thing.*

Beware, then, my fellow-disciples, beware, in the superintendence and regulation of your disposition, principles, and conduct, lest, through inattention to some essential department of duty, your partial services be wholly frustrated;—lest you be found to have either believed or laboured in vain; and lest, having been not far from your eternal recompense, you should yet unhappily fall short of its glory. Serve God truly; serve him comprehensively; serve him with an attached and a perfect heart. Think not to please him—presume not to lay confident hold on the unspeakable benefits of Christian redemption, by offering upon his altar religion without morality, or morals apart from religious service;

* Prov. xxiii. 26.

or the principles of an enlightened and decent Deist, who pretends to borrow his law of practice and his hopes from Revelation, in place of the united principles and practice of a Christian; or, lastly, the belief and practice without the animating spirit, the ardour, energy, and feeling enjoined by the Gospel. After your firmest resolves, and your most strenuous endeavours, you will, it is true, still, in one sense, lack many things. You will be weak, faulty, sinful, unjustifiable; you will have many trespasses of infirmity, and not a few, perhaps, of presumption, to provoke the divine severity. For these, however, ample allowances will be made. For these, on your sincere repentance, the Almighty has provided a remedy, in the merits and mediation of the ever blessed Redeemer. But if you are going forward towards the grave, in deliberate reliance on a service, imperfect in any of the respects now enumerated, tremble, for you are proceeding in the path of self-delusion;—despair, or stop short, for you are advancing to the gulf of destruction. What then, in a few words, must man do to be saved*? Thou shalt love (not the God of unassisted reason, but) the Lord thy God †, the God of Revelation, the God of Christians, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul; and thy neighbour, in all things, as thyself. This do, and thou shalt live ‡. On these two com-

* Acts, xvi. 30. † Luke, x. 27. ‡ Matt. xxii. 40.

mandments hang the law and the Prophets. On these two commandments, fairly interpreted, and comprehensively considered, hang the Evangelists, the Apostles, and the Gospel.

S E R M O N VI.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

I CORINTHIANS, CHAP. IX. LATTER PART OF
VERSE 24.

So run, that ye may obtain.

IN the neighbourhood of Corinth were exhibited those public games, in which the Heathen world so greatly delighted. The city of Corinth itself, indeed, stood, as is well known, on a narrow neck of land, or isthmus, to which the field of one of these spectacles was so contiguous, as to distinguish it by the name of Isthmian: nor did the scenes of the others lie at any considerable distance. Hither, every fourth year, an immense concourse of people resorted from all parts of the civilized world, to witness feats of strength, and contests in agility. Among these exercises, the foot-race, as historians relate, was not the least distinguished. The combatants, previous to the time of trial, underwent a long course of preparatory discipline. By inuring their bodies to much hardship and fatigue; by submitting to the most abstemious regimen, and by a frequent and daily practice in those manly exercises, wherein they hoped for distinction, they brought themselves into a

state of readiness for contending with a fair prospect of success. When the day of competition at length arrived, they who were about to run for the prize on foot, cast off their garments, anointed their limbs with oil, and disengaged themselves from every kind of incumbrance or weight, which might at all retard the nimbleness of their motions, and the swiftness of their progress. To conquer in these contests was regarded as one of the highest honours to which man could hope to attain. The intrinsic value of the rewards immediately received, was not, it is true, considerable; the successful candidates being deemed amply recompensed, in obtaining a crown of olive, or of laurel. On returning, however, to their several cities, a breach was made in the walls for their entrance; and, during the rest of their lives, in addition to the glory they had earned (to that meed which they chiefly prized), they enjoyed repose and plenty; being maintained in a public hall, at the expense of their fellow-citizens.

This short account of the ancient Pagan games, will serve to throw light on several passages of Scripture. St. Paul makes frequent allusion to these contests; and it must be evident that he could in no case, with greater propriety, enforce his reasonings by similitudes derived from them, than when addressing him-

self to the Corinthians, to whom they were rendered familiar, by vicinity to the courses on which most of them were celebrated.

Know ye not, says he, that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain.—And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things: now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible: I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I (an allusion to preparation for the exercise of wrestling, likewise practised at the Pagan games), so fight I, not as one beating the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.—Wherefore, he writes to the Hebrews, seeing we are encompassed with so great a cloud of witnesses (glancing at the numerous spectators of the Grecian contests), let us lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race that is set before us †. And to Timothy he thus, at the close of life, addresses himself:—I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness ‡. It is manifest, that the Apostle, in all these passages, borrows his comparisons from the Heathen spectacles, in recommending ardour in our spiritual course, or in displaying the magnitude and value of our everlasting reward.*

* 1 Cor. ix. 24, &c. † Heb. xii. 1. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

The chief duties pointed out by this comparison, as enabling Christian disciples to run the race that is set before them, so that they may obtain the glorious recompense proposed, seem to be these three:—

1st, Bringing the body into subjection.

2dly, Laying aside every weight and incumbrance.

And 3dly, Patient perseverance in their heavenly course.

1st. We find that the combatants in the Grecian games subjected themselves to much self-denial and hardship, and were TEMPERATE in all things, when preparing for the course. In like manner will it behove the followers of Jesus Christ, to adapt themselves for running the race of life, by the previous discipline of bringing the body into subjection. The body is one of those spiritual enemies, whom at our baptism we promised to subdue: and fully is every child of Adam aware, that there is in his breast a law of the members warring against the law of the mind. Now we well know that the intemperate use of bounties designed by Providence for our nourishment, strengthens the former law; we know that it is a nurse of those angry passions and evil inclinations, which, even without being inflamed or propelled, require all the force and vigilance of principle,

aided by divine grace, for their due control. Hence temperance, self-denial, and abstinence from hurtful things*, become highly essential branches of Christian obedience; since wickedness is the most securely avoided when we keep it at a distance, by resisting the first and remotest occasions of it. But,

2dly, After this preparatory attention, the next requisite to success in the Christian course is stated by the Apostle to be, the laying aside of every weight. As the competitors in the Heathen games divested themselves of their flowing garments, and stood disencumbered from every hindrance to the swiftness of their progress, the followers of Jesus should stand not less disengaged, from all impediments to their advancement towards perfection. Pursuing this allusion, we may pronounce worldly-mindedness, or an immoderate love for the possessions, the pursuits, the enjoyments of this vain scene, to be one weight deserving of being laid aside, as impeding the soul which aspires after a better. May not he who fondly dotes on things below, whose attention is almost exclusively engaged in the projects of pulling down his granaries and building larger; in the

* Qui studet optatam cursû contingere metam,
 Multa tulit fecitque puer, sudavit et alsit,
 Abstinit, &c.—HOR.

calculation of advantages ; in the establishment of connexions ; in whatever, in short, belongs to ambition or avarice, while an awful futurity holds at best only a secondary and a narrow place in his thoughts and affections ; may not such a man—and every society of professing Christians, there is reason to fear, comprehends many characters answering too faithfully to the description—be regarded as running a race in a loose and weighty robe, which at the least retards his speed, if it prove not the occasion of his stumbling? HE does not so run that he may obtain : for the combatants unto whom the victory is promised, have been portrayed as standing with their loins girded, and with every weight laid aside.

Our progress in the course of heaven is likewise impeded, by *the weight* of spiritual listlessness. We would fain obtain the rewards proposed by our divine Master, could they be gained by the idle adoption of speculative religious opinions, by the profession of a fruitless belief, or by the practice of some few agreeable and easy services ; but we judge it to be too arduous an undertaking to follow him, through the activity of energetic, or the self-denial of painful duties. We seek the palms without the dust of the course* ; the consolations, but not the toils, of religion. We shrink from the thought of

* *Sine pulvere palmæ.*—HOR.

surmounting any obstacle, of rousing to any exertion, of enduring any restraint, of taking up any thing resembling a cross, in following that Leader who hath showed us how to enter, to continue, and to finish our course with energy and joy. Or perhaps we may loiter at the present moment, looking forward to a proposed acceleration of speed, to be performed at some indefinite future period. If, however, we seek to secure a recompense of glory, we must lose no time; we must up and be doing:—disencumbered from the weight of disinclination to diligence, and serving God with fervency of spirit.

A third incumbrance to be cast away by those who desire to run their spiritual race with success, is their prevailing weakness, their distinguishing propensity to evil. *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets us* *. Bodily temperament, education, habit, surrounding circumstances, and condition or calling in life, give every person a bias to some particular offence. One individual is peculiarly prone to avarice, another to profusion;—this man is naturally inclined to vanity, that to ambition;—a third to anger:—the predominant infirmity with some is idleness; with others, voluptuousness; with many, pride. And we need not doubt, that to combat our favourite

* Heb. xii. 1.

inclination; to convert slothfulness into diligence; religious coldness into zeal; unruly appetite into self-control, and irritability of temper into complacency and sweetness;—to enter into a covenant with the roving eye, the profane tongue, or the prodigal hand, that they shall henceforth abstain from the trespasses which nature prompts, and which habit perhaps has confirmed;—must be a testimony of dutifulness, and an offering of praise, more pleasing to the Almighty than the cattle upon a thousand hills. Let each of us then study to acquire a knowledge of his own mind; and whenever he shall have discovered his vulnerable part, there let him establish his strictest watch. Let him there be jealous even of innocent indulgences, with which he knows danger to be ever so remotely connected. There let all the eyes of principle be continually awake, to keep at a distance the first suggestions of temptation, the faintest appearances of evil. There let him ever beseech Almighty God to plant the strongest reinforcements of his grace.—By these means is laid aside the weight of a besetting sin—the chief impediment in the Christian course.

Sdly, Perseverance in this course is the last duty enjoined by the comparison which the Apostle has in this passage instituted. We must

run with *patience** the race that is set before us. This duty, it merits to be carefully observed, has a reference to both the others already recommended. We must persevere in our preparatory discipline of moderation and restraint, as well as in the act of running on our heavenly course:—I mean in disentangling ourselves from all incumbrances upon our speed, and in diligently surmounting the various obstacles to our progress. The combatants of old underwent a long course of self-denial, in which they strictly and unremittingly persisted for many months; and pushed forward, on the day of actual contest, with unabated ardour to the goal, ever keeping in view the high reward of their toil; and neither induced by the intense heat of the day, nor by the clouds of dust, nor by the length of the course, nor by the love of inglorious repose, to resign their emulation for the mastery, or even to stop short for a breathing. Behold the example which stimulates us, my fellow-labourers, in running the nobler race of Christianity, to *held fast the profession of our faith without wavering* †, and to continue the faithful servants of our Master, Christ, even unto our lives' end ‡. We may lay our account with meeting impediments in our progress; with allurements and temptations to the slackening of our pace, or to desisting from the pursuit of our object. Some will, doubtless, be

* Heb. xii. 1. † Heb. x. 23. ‡ Baptismal Service.

invited back to the world by the syren song of indolence and voluptuousness, chanted by their own depraved inclinations, and re-echoed by their evil counsellors. Some will be tempted by that fatal self-delusion, which holds out a promise of the divine indulgence to temporary intermissions of diligence. Others will be endangered by those difficulties and disgusts, which, with the intent of deterring them from perseverance in their spiritual course, their grand adversary throws in the way of a life of holiness: by a view of the limited extent of their services; by a timid dread, which is apt to arise in the humble breast, of the unacceptableness of well-meant, though abortive, exertions. Satan will attempt to divert many from their way, by contrasting the uniformity and restraints of a life of obedience, with the variety and freedom to be enjoyed in the courts of sin. To no small number, the absence of that prosperity, and of those temporary advantages, which sometimes, though not invariably, constitute the earthly rewards of virtue;—to others, the privation of comforts or enjoyments, the misinterpretation of their motives, the censures that may be unjustly thrown on their better actions, will prove a severe trial. But, my Christian brethren, in the view of sober judgment, I am confident you will regard such temptations as insignificant; and unmoved by

any of these things—yea, counting not your lives to be dear unto yourselves, so that you may finish your course with joy*—you will surely determine not to be weary in well-doing †: since you know, (consolatory and blessed assurance!) that, in due time, *ye shall enjoy, if ye faint not ‡*; that *he who endureth unto the end shall be saved*; and that although your remuneration be withheld for a season—for the whole brief season of the present existence—your Judge will certainly at the last arise, to vindicate his providence, *to avenge his elect §*, to execute and administer strict justice upon the earth, and to deal out to the faithful that ample recompense, which it is surely worth suffering and resisting far more, than THEY have ever been tried with, to receive.

But still further:—perseverance implies progression. Not to go forward, says the proverb, is to fall back. Diligencé is not only to be persisted in, but to be quickened: for our Lord, we know, has commanded his disciples to *go on, from strength to strength ||*. Not halting, while any part of the course remains untraversed; satisfied with no attainment while there is higher excellence in view; not mistaking a stage in the way of righteousness for the goal; let the followers of

* Acts, xx. 24.

† Gal. vi. 9.

‡ Matt. x. 22.

§ Luke, xviii. 7.

|| Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

Jesus study to regard the grave as the only resting-place allowed to their feet. Let them not account themselves *to have already attained, either to be already perfect**: but this one thing let them do—forgetting, as insignificant, the attainments in obedience which are behind, and aspiring to the heights which remain unclimbed—looking forward to the immeasurable distance which still remains betwixt their imperfect holiness and the standard of their duty, let them press towards the mark for *the prize*—a prize how glorious!—*even the high calling of God in Christ Jesus †. Be thou faithful, and advance in holiness unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life ‡.*

How just, and yet how humiliating, is the scriptural observation, that the children of the present world are wiser in their generation than the children of light! *These* require not that any one should admonish them, *so to run that they may obtain.* Whether their object be wealth, or power, or fame, they place it, and they hold it steadily, before their view. It is the darling wish of their inmost souls; the cherished theme of all their secret musings: to remember it, is the thrilling of their nerves; to compass it, the torture of their fancy. It visits them with the earliest gleam of dawn; it mingles with them

* Phil. iii. 12.

† Phil. iii. 14.

‡ Rev. ii. 10.

in the crowd; it attends them to the shade of solitude; it rises to their conception, when they fold their eyes in slumber. They pant after it with unabated ardour; they pursue it with unwearied diligence. Thus they are continually running THEIR race: and of their crown—poor and worthless as it is—they lose not sight for a moment. To how much self-denial, to how many inconveniencies do they subject themselves! Some, on the world's service, will traverse half the globe; will encounter the roughest storms and perils of the ocean, and brave the trying vicissitudes of various climates:—some cheerfully submit to mean and servile offices; while others waste their health by midnight application. But however different the paths pursued, however various the ends desired, the observer may mark all to be feelingly alive, all eagerly advancing. No probable means of success in their respective views are left untried. No obstacles, no difficulties, no dangers intimidate them: the distance of their reward serves to quicken their exertion; the apprehension of failure adds interest to the object; they break through all the barriers of resistance, and rise with fresh vigour from every disappointment.

Now, the sons of ambition, the children of the present world, will do all this for the pitiful

sake of obtaining—a corruptible crown, a perishable possession, a bursting bubble; while we—strange infatuated beings—take no such pains (far less pains indeed are required of us) to obtain a crown that is incorruptible, as it is splendid. The objects for which they strive may not perhaps be attained, after all their fond anxieties, their watchings, and their labours: and if attained, may afford them but trifling satisfaction—at best, can yield satisfaction only for a little while; for they all partake of the fashion of that world, which we know is itself passing away. Shall THEY then, who propose to themselves in their earthly course an uncertain, trivial, transitory happiness, exhibit a stricter self-denial, a severer self-command, a more unwearied perseverance, than we display—WE, who are toiling after a sure, unsullied, unspeakable, eternal recompense? Shall men, whose insignificant toy of desire is some worldly advantage, some low and fleeting enjoyment, manifest higher wisdom in adapting their means to their ends, than we who seek for glory, and honour, and immortality? Do we read that the combatants in a Pagan race subjected themselves for a length of time to many and great inconveniencies, and all to grasp a withering reward, and a short-lived applause—a reward and an applause which many of them might

lose, and which only one could in the end obtain;—and can we endure to think that no sacrifice of inclination, no exertion of virtue, shall be tendered to Heaven by those who run the Christian course; where the multitude of spectators, the cloud of witnesses, is vast and honourable; where God himself presides in their assembly; where not one, but all, who run may be victorious; where our fellow-combatants are saints destined to eternity; and where the contest is not (as in an earthly race) a trial of jealousy, but a delightful rivalship of mutual endearment and reciprocal help; a course where the very act of running has its pleasures; where the honour of success is inconceivable; the shame and the pain attending failure dreadful; where the prize can be contended for no more than once; and where that prize is an inheritance that fadeth not away?

Never let so reproachful an imputation be alleged. From those children of the Pagan world, who ran over an earthly course, let us learn so to run, that we may obtain. Let us deeply weigh those animating encouragements to the ardent and steady prosecution of our object, which to us are vouchsafed, but of which they were wholly destitute. Let us *look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**—that

* Heb. xii. 2.

Master who hath trodden the way before us—who knew and sustained all its difficulties and toils, *enduring the cross, despising the pain* *. Let us remember and imitate HIM who bore so much, and so gloriously taught his followers to endure, whenever in their advancement they slacken their pace, or begin to *be faint and weary in their minds* †. Let us rejoice to think, that by the intelligence which he imparted, and through the sufferings which he endured, we are now certified, that we *so fight, not as one idly beating the air; and that we run, not as uncertainly* ‡, with regard to our view of victory. Above all, let us gather animation in our course, from reflecting, that he hath provided, in the gracious and potent influences of his Spirit (influences and aids of which they who strove in Pagan games, and who lived in the Pagan world, were utterly unacquainted), nerves to our weakness, spirits to our weariness, vigour to our resolution, help to our perseverance, and encouragement to our fears of failure. If happily we run, relying on his all-sufficiency, in having purchased our glorious recompense, and imploring to be succoured by his might in the inner man—not forgetting, at the same time, to put forth with eagerness our own strength—then shall we so run as certainly to obtain: for *we are able to do all things*

* Heb. xii. 2.

† Heb. xii. 3.

‡ 1 Cor. ix. 26.

*through Christ, which strengtheneth**; and we shall be conquerors in the race that is set before us. Yes; I but repeat the venerable language of Scripture:—*We shall be more than conquerors through Him which loved us*†.

Like the combatants of old, the unwearied disciple of Christ accelerates his speed, and redoubles his diligence, as the space to be traversed becomes more and more contracted, and as the time allotted for journeying is further advanced. As he proceeds towards the goal, he obtains a closer, and a more distinct view of his ample reward. This recruits his fainting spirits. It stimulates his weariness to collect his remaining strength, and to throw it into the last exertion. And now the victor, terminating his career, is received by an innumerable company of fellow-citizens on high. The vault of heaven rings with shouts and acclamations, sent up by the spirits of just men made perfect; while angels stand, all ready with their palms, to proclaim his name, and to celebrate his praises. *It is finished*‡:—*his course is finished with joy*§. I hear the cry of triumph, and the welcome of congratulation. He reaches the last line||. He is comforted and recom-

* Phil. iv. 13. † Rom. viii. 37. ‡ John, xix. 30.

§ Acts, xx. 24.

|| “*Mors ultima linea rerum est* :”—a phrase deriving its beauty from the allusion to that line which was drawn across the extremity of the race-course.

pensed with the approving *Well done* *, pronounced by the Judge and Remunerator of his toils. Lo! the garland of immortality has dropped at his feet: and he rests for ever from his labours.

* Matt. xxv. 21.

S E R M O N VII.

ON THE RIGHT GOVERNMENT OF THOUGHT.

PSALM CXXXIX. VERSE 23.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me,
and know my thoughts.*

HUMAN legislators being incompetent to observe what passes in the dark and secret recesses of the breast, their enactments relate only to actual injuries, to ostensible demonstrations of iniquity. God, discerning the heart of man, establishes laws which take cognizance of his thoughts. Nothing, indeed, can possibly exhibit the divine purity in a clearer or more striking light, than the condemnation of those faint suggestions of evil, which so frequently, like clouds, pass over the imagination. It shows (and in doing so, should abase that presumptuous virtue which boasts of a faultless EXTERNAL conduct) that only a conception of sinfulness, though it die away in the heart which has entertained it, and never be embodied in substantial transgression, is accounted by Heaven to be defiling to the soul, and is obnoxious to the displeasure of immaculate Holiness. Nor does the wisdom of the Deity, in

such an appointment, appear less conspicuous than his purity. So refined a view of duty enables us to satisfy our minds, that we act from motives of genuine piety. If we confined our caution to our actions alone, we might have cause to doubt, whether the love of human approbation were not, exclusively, our incentive to righteous conduct. By exercising a jealous control over thought, which to the eye of man is invisible, we learn that we are not deceived in supposing the love and fear of the Almighty to possess and to sway our minds. Besides, since thought is the spring of action; since evil, *when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin**; since whatsoever is guilty in conduct, originated in depravity of intention; to watch and to purify thought and intention, is the more effectually to prevent the existence of crimes, and to secure innocence of living. Principle is thus surrounded with an additional fence, against the assaults of its wily enemy. Temptation is removed to a more secure distance, than if it were suffered to take quiet possession of the affections, and we were only warned to beware of its breaking out in the conduct. We can crush it more easily by going forth to the encounter while it is yet afar off, than by tamely waiting for its nearer encroachments. Prudence makes sure its retreat from the storm, in calling for its chariot, when the

* James, i. 15.

rising cloud appears to be no bigger than a man's hand*. Evil cherished in the fancy gathers strength from indulgence, and may soon become almost too powerful for resistance. A slight exertion might have strangled it in the cradle: but, despised in its infancy, it grows up into a formidable opponent.

The Father of spirits having, for these wise reasons, commanded us to carry back the control of self-government from the actions to their source, you will allow it to be material that we should know precisely, what thoughts deserve to be pronounced criminal, and how such as bear that character may be best avoided.

From the variety of improper and prohibited conceptions which may lodge in the capacious storehouse of the human breast, and of which the attempt were fruitless to exhibit a complete enumeration, we may place at the head of our present selection, those which are the offspring of *idleness*:—thoughts not fixed upon any determinate subject, but roving about as chance or caprice directs. Such a loose current of our ideas deserves to be guarded against,—not only as idleness in every shape is culpable, but further, as conscience knows full well, that when the mind is thus left unsettled and wandering, rarely do the vigilance and malevolence

* 1 Kings, xviii. 44.

of our spiritual adversary fail to furnish a topic which shall fix its meditations: while his assaults are here the more to be dreaded, as from the negative criminality of musings simply idle, his approach may perhaps be the less suspected.

Equally censurable with idle meditations, are such as are occupied upon *frivolous* subjects. By these, much valuable time is squandered;—talents, for the use of which we are accountable, are misapplied;—and the mind is sunk in a habit of languor and softness, which destroys all its relish for manly occupation, unfits it for active and useful exertion, and disposes it to voluptuousness, with its train of attendant evils.

Allied to idle and frivolous conceptions, are those that are stamped with the character of *vanity*. When our secret reflections are permitted by us to turn upon an admiration of our own real or fancied good qualities; when our minds silently swell with a notion of personal superiority, it is not to be questioned that we are then included in the censure addressed by the Prophet of old to Jerusalem:—*Wash thy heart from wickedness; how long shall thy VAIN thoughts lodge within thee*?*

* Jer. iv. 14.

In particular, my fellow-worshippers, I would beseech you to recollect, that the Pharisaical self-gratulation here condemned assumes its very worst character, when it relates to the possession of any religious or moral pre-eminence: since it then too frequently speaks the language of self-deceit; *as when a man esteems himself something, when he is nothing**: always that of unchristian presumption; for *he who thinketh he standeth, ought to take heed lest he fall* †.

Proud *schemes of future exaltation* form as improper a theme for the ponderings of thought, as a sense of present excellence. For although it be prudent, and proper, within reasonable limits, to consider what improvements our condition is capable of, yet those aspiring, wild, ambitious views, which dissatisfy us with our lot, look high above our sphere, see happiness no where but in the possession of exorbitant wealth or power, and are continually employed in forming projects for the attainment of them, —you can be at no loss to see—are most widely different from an humble, and on that account a laudable, or allowable, desire of rising in life from poverty to worldly comfort, or from inutility to the power of distributing beneficence. *Lord, said David, my heart is not haughty:—neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me* ‡.

* Gal. vi. 3. † 1 Cor. x. 12. ‡ Psalm cxxx. 1.

A similar line will be drawn by the disciple of Christ betwixt wise forethought and immoderate concern about the morrow. That man has read his Bible to but little purpose, who regards it as inculcating a lesson of improvidence. Consider the approaching hour:—take precaution against the evil day:—this is, even in a temporal sense, the mandate of Christianity, not less than the maxim of worldly prudence:—*for if any man provide not for his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel**. But when we have made our reasonable arrangements of sagacity, and of diligence, we have there reached the utmost limit of duty:—we err, and we rebel, in disquieting our minds with anxious or boding apprehensions as to the issue; which ought ever to be left, with the most implicit confidence, in the hands of the all-wise Disposer of events.

As the heir of immortality must not busy his thoughts in looking up to the pinnacles of greatness, so, if fortune have placed him there, he will not less sedulously avoid *supercilious* musings, with reference to those beneath him. Contemptuousness, though latent in the spirit, is forbidden. Not only the *high look*, but the *proud heart*, is *sin* †.

* 1 Tim. v. 8.

† Prov. xxi. 4.

If it be unlawful to DESPISE, it must necessarily be still more sinful to HATE our brother, in imagination. At all times let us study, therefore, with religious care, to deliver our breasts from malignant trains of thinking, in their various shades of envy, hatred, or resentment. Truly they are a legion of evil spirits: and the voice of resolute faith must charge them, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, that they come forth. Charity not only inflicteth —*she thinketh no evil**.

The love of God, like brotherly love, ought to exist, by itself, as a principle in the heart, in entire abstraction from any reference to the conduct. In this view, as malice violates our love towards man, *repining* is not less at variance with that higher affection, which is due to the Almighty Governor. Both, as offences of the heart, are of serious magnitude; though the former should never issue forth in an injury, or the latter be heard in an audible murmur.—When smarting, therefore, under affliction, suppress, my Christian hearers, all those rebellious stirrings within the soul, which though but in conception, rashly arraign the goodness, or presume to call in question the superintendence, of God.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

You need hardly be reminded in how clear and forcible language *voluptuous* conceptions are reprobated in the Gospel, as tainting to the purity of the soul. *Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, there is an adultery of the heart.*

Let it next be observed, that conduct unlawful in itself, may reiterate its original sinfulness in *recollection*:—as when, a long time after trespasses have been committed, we summon back their shades by the magic of a depraved mind; and endeavour, as it were, once more, in fancy, to realize the recalled illusions. Though, from age, poverty, or other change of circumstance, they be now happily no longer perpetrated, nevertheless, when thus ideally cherished, it is by no means safe, indeed it is most presumptuous, to rest satisfied that they are entirely forsaken. If they WERE forsaken, they would be forgotten too;—or if recollected, recollected only with remorse.

To a conscience of any delicacy it must, in like manner, be evident, that there is a particular guilt of *forecast*, as well as of *recollection*; and this, apart from its sinfulness, in leading to the offence anticipated. A mind

which delights in transporting itself into the future, and in revelling among vicious joys, to the possession of which it looks forward, cannot with good reason compliment itself upon its spotlessness, should accident, or even should compunction intervene, to prevent the actual gratification of its malignant wishes, or its irregular appetites.

Once more : thoughts, innocent in themselves, become censurable when cherished at improper times or seasons. Thus it may be extremely laudable to direct reflection, when no more important interest urges, to the concerns of business, the arrangement of our household, the offices of civility, or the ties of friendship. But if such topics of meditation intrude themselves, and are welcomed, in the temple of religion, or during any sacred exercise ; if, while our whole souls should be engrossed by the one thing needful, we are careful and troubled about domestic occupations ; if, when we are supposed to be purchasing the pearl of great price, we are in fancy buying and selling earthly merchandise ; if, in the hour when we are admitted to high converse with our God, we are in some distant land, conversing with an absent relative, then have we truly desecrated the house of prayer, and converted it into a market-place of worldlings.

I am aware that all these various trains of reflection here recounted, will rush unbidden into the best-regulated mind. I am aware how weak is human nature, though the spirit, the inclination, be ever so willing. Whatever is thus involuntary, I trust in the goodness of God, and I think I may with safety venture to assure you, will not be charged to your final account. Evil, says our great poet, in a bold expression, though somewhat too daring when applied in the same sense to the Divinity as to his creatures—

Evil into the heart of God or man
 May come and go, so unapprov'd; and leave
 No spot or blame behind.

The sum of our duty, in a single word, with respect to all such unholy inmates of the breast, is not to invite,—and if they have entered, self-invited, not to harbour them.

It is nevertheless incumbent on us to be extremely well assured, that the thoughts which we presume will be blotted from our offences, are actually, and in all respects, involuntary:—and this caution I would most earnestly press, my friends, on your attention, since here, more perhaps than under any other circumstances, the mind is apt to practise much self-delusion. If our ordinary conduct flow on in a current

that is favourable to evil thoughts—if they find entrance, through our culpable neglect of those precautions which religion and reason prescribe—in this case, though wholly unsolicited at the time, though unapproved, and though even rejected on their entrance, such thoughts are by no means to be classed amongst those, in which the will has no concern or power whatsoever, or to be excused as altogether unavoidable. When the thief, however uninvited and however resisted, has entered, while we slumbered, into our house; to say we were without suspicion or fear, affords but a feeble apology for our negligence in having failed to secure our door with a bolt. Evil habits are incentives to evil meditations; and all who indulge in them are accountable for their natural consequences, however far it may have been from their intention or wish, to involve themselves in these consequences.

Thus then, put in possession of a list of criminal thoughts, from which the mind is interested in keeping itself free, we only now require a few plain directions calculated to assist us in that pious exercise.

1. One expedient which, I think, will very greatly contribute to the preservation of internal purity, is the habit of taking frequent cognizance of our thoughts; of arresting these

noiseless travellers in their course, and questioning them as to their ultimate destination. Often let us turn our observation inwards, that we may mark what is there silently passing; WHAT CONCEPTIONS are contemplated by us with fondness; what schemes are in rehearsal for the great theatre of action. Let us ask ourselves, whether the thought on which we may happen to be brooding be not one suggested by our spiritual adversary, with a view to our eternal ruin. If it be further indulged, to what will it lead? Is it dishonourable to God?—is it sully-
ing to purity?—is it unworthy of our dignity, or injurious to our hopes, as candidates for immortal life? Has it a tendency to produce, in any measure, detriment to our neighbour? Is it such as we should be ashamed of, if it were exposed to public view? And if, in replying to such interrogatories, we stand self-convicted, shall we not hasten to separate ourselves from so dangerous an inmate? By thus sitting frequently in judgment over our own minds, we shall be enabled to guard the avenues of temptation—to detect, and to quell, in their earliest appearance, the rebellious movements of irregular reflection.

2. To avoid whatever conduces to the tainting of the thoughts, may be recommended as an additional measure of prudence. Here we

may resign ourselves with safety to the direction of that sage and unerring guide, experience. Almost all persons know, from recollection of the past, what conduct it will now be their wisdom to adopt, with a view to their internal purity in time to come. Attention to this hint is so much the more necessary, as, independently of it, on the present head, no comprehensive general direction for the regulation of the thoughts can be prescribed, that shall be suitable to all the varieties of human character and disposition. There are amusements which may tarnish the purity of one mind, and soften the constitutional asperity of another. Evil thoughts may take possession of one breast in the deepest seclusion of solitude, and of another in the haunts of mirthful society. Let every one cultivate an acquaintance with his own character, that he may avoid such scenes, studies, recreations, and associates, as he finds or suspects that he cannot attach himself to, without opening a door to the entrance of evil imaginations, or of loose affections, into his breast. Some circumstances, indeed, are of a less doubtful cast, and may be condemned and prohibited as universally dangerous. A mind depraved, for example, by inactive, by contentious, or by sensual habits of living, will necessarily be a storehouse of *imaginations that are evil continually* *. As the thoughts affect

* Gen. vi. 5.

the conduct, the conduct in such a case, it has above been shown, can hardly fail to impart a colour to the thoughts. External impropriety of speech, of attire, of behaviour, we may rest assured, is incompatible with inward spotlessness. If it proceed not from mental depravity as a cause, it will infallibly produce that disposition as its consequence.

3. While our duty demands that we diligently seek to avoid all such tendencies to improper trains of thinking, with equal sedulousness is it proper for us to court whatever encourages and fosters innocent and virtuous musings.

Employment, contentment, benevolence, peacefulness;—a selection of harmless amusements and upright associates, constitute, if I may so speak, a company of good spirits, which keep watch around the integrity and purity of the heart. Since, whatever be the objects of our ordinary search, on these will our thoughts be the most prone to dwell;—or, in the language of Scripture, since *wherever the treasure is, there naturally will the heart be also**, it must be of the utmost consequence to the regulation of the thoughts that we study to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven—that we establish in our minds a determined and an habitual predilection for things above. Learning to asso-

* Matt. vi. 21.

ciate with our idea of sin, whatever is odious, mean, ungrateful, and dangerous, and to regard the low pleasures and toils of the present life as unworthy the dignity and destination of immortal beings, our souls will but rarely recur to subjects which we shall have thus previously painted and held up to the eye of our minds in their native colours of deformity or degradation. When a concern for the soul, a love of obedience, and a fervent zeal for the divine glory, have been fixed as ruling passions, as paramount principles, in the breast, our musings will as naturally, because with as much fondness, find the way to *whatsoever things are true, honest, just, lovely, and of good report**, as those of the worldly-minded will wander to the honours of ambition, the pleasures of sensuality, or the hoards of avarice.

4. The grand and important secret, however, for attaining a right control over the thoughts, and that without attention to which all other measures are nugatory, is intercourse with God.

To him it is supremely necessary that we should learn to look up, as to the great and continually-present Inspector of the thoughts. He is called by David, in his dying admonition to Solomon, *the Lord who searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the*

► Phil. iv. 8.

*thoughts**. And the Apostle to the Hebrews writes, *The word of God is quick, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;—all things are naked and open unto the eye of Him with whom we have to do*†. Thus He with whom we have to do spieth the germ of evil, before it is evolved into actual offence; and traces the whole rise and progress of its growth, from a thought to a desire, a desire to a stronger inclination, an inclination to a resolve ripe for mischief. It is right also to remember, that all which he thus seeth, he will most assuredly call into the strictest judgment. This purpose of God to bring every secret device, and every imagination, before his tribunal of righteousness, was fully declared on the earliest appearance on earth, of Him whom he hath constituted the judge. *This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*‡.

These notions concerning the Almighty, and the Son whom he hath sent, seem well adapted, if rendered familiar in the breast, not only to preserve it from the intrusion of evil conceptions, but to expel them, if, through human infirmity, they have found entrance:—*casting down imaginations, and bringing into captivity every thought*§.

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

† Heb. iv. 12.

‡ Luke, ii. 35.

§ 2 Cor. x. 5.

Still further benefit will accrue to the Christian, from accustoming himself to consider the heart as the residence of God. *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy;—for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are;—for the Spirit of God dwelleth in you**. If the august Spirit of God hath most graciously vouchsafed to offer himself as the inhabitant of our breasts, awe, gratitude, interest, must all conspire in prompting us to prepare for him a clean and a garnished house. It cannot be presumed that he will deign to make his continuing abode amidst impurity, pride, malice, or covetousness: or even if it could, shall not some marks of reverence be deemed due to the most dignified of all superiors? This, I think, is of itself a consideration sufficiently powerful to incite us to make all things ready within, for the reception of so honourable a guest.

Above all, let us avail ourselves of the high and glorious privilege to which God hath admitted us—that of approaching him in prayer. By this exercise we refine and purify our nature; exalt it above the attractions of sense, and the allurements of life; we establish a correspondence with the spiritual world, and rise to the throne of excellence and the fountain of light. In such ascents we imbibe the spirit of the

* 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

highest heavens. The thoughts are sublimated. We become holy as our Father is holy.

The chief benefit, however, to be expected from devotion, is that energetic succour from above which it will procure, to second, or to render efficacious, our humble endeavours for establishing our hearts in innocence. Let us beseech our heavenly Father to fortify our breasts with this highly needful and valuable affusion, to enter into our souls, and to visit his temple; —to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his mighty name; adoring him by inward purity, as well as by inoffensiveness of conduct, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and our Redeemer.—
Amen.

S E R M O N VIII.

THE FALL OF THE LEAF: A SERMON FOR
THE BEGINNING OF WINTER.

ISAIAH, CHAP. LXIV. PART OF VERSE 6.

We all do fade as a leaf.

IT is an art peculiar to the religious and reflecting mind, to ennoble, by its touch, the most common objects and trivial occurrences:—and while these, to the vulgar and the worldly, furnish only occasions of idle pleasure, or of stupid admiration, to convert them into lessons of improvement, and to elevate them into means of grace.

When, at the present declining season of the year, we observe the striking changes produced in the vegetable kingdom; when the dispersed and withered leaves of autumn strew almost every step of our way, the mournful reflection suggested to the holy Prophet must deeply affect the breasts of the serious, though it can hardly fail, we may reasonably presume, to make some impression, even on the more unthinking: *We all do fade as a leaf.*

Sad indeed, but useful, are the meditations arising from a view of this comparison; solemn, but important, the lecture which it delivers. Let us prepare our minds for a short attention to it. If, from so trifling an incident as the scattering of the foliage, we can extract any sentiments likely to prove serviceable to our spirits, we may indeed be said to possess that disposition which discovers a tongue in every leaf, a moral in every object of creation, or, to employ a far more awful and impressive language, which hears *the voice of the Lord God walking amongst the trees* in the great garden of nature*.

I shall, with due simplicity, consider the few words which are to constitute the present theme of discourse, as applicable to our *religion*, to our *prosperity*, and to our *lives*.

1. And first, it may, with too much truth, be affirmed, that *the RELIGION of many does fade away as a leaf*. This point of the comparison will, no doubt, appear to you to be established on a remote and fanciful allusion: but I have thought proper to place it in the beginning of the comment, as it seems, from the context, to have been the original idea which occupied the mind of the Prophet himself. Attend to his own

* Genesis, iii. 8.

words:—*We all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away: and there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth himself to take hold of thee.* On high festivals, and at particular seasons, we entertain and profess a warm love towards God, a fervent and an honourable zeal for his law; and we then form earnest resolutions of labouring, with unshaken perseverance, and with strict devotion, in the Christian life. To such purposes we remain firm for a brief season; and may at that time be compared to the full-grown and goodly cedar, whose boughs are spread over Lebanon, and whose top aspires to heaven. This happy condition, however, is of no long continuance. Our returning iniquities, to use the words of the Prophet, *take us, like the wind, away from it, and we all do fade as a leaf.* Our better resolutions wax feeble, and drop away. The chill winter of our devotion soon approaches: and our coldness and falling away from God, and from our better purposes, is first and chiefly marked by a neglect of prayer. *There is none,* adds Isaiah, *that calleth upon thy name: none so earnestly concerned for the well-being of his immortal soul, as to perceive and to recognize the necessity of his imploring for pardon and grace.* Or, if supplication be performed, it is offered with indifference: *no one* STIRRETH himself to

make application to God, by undoubting faith, entire repentance, fervent devotion, and unwearied perseverance. Our pious affections, in a word, are gradually cooled by intercourse with a selfish and sensual world, till too often they at length become altogether lifeless, as the dry and withered leaves of the departing year.

2. With equally little play of the imagination, may it next be observed, as a still more general truth, that our *prosperity* doth fade as a leaf. One day the son of man finds himself high in health, and fortunate in his worldly condition; numbering about his table a flourishing family; surrounded by attached, and, as he imagines, by unfailing friends. He perceives, with complacency, that he has risen, like the gradual springing up of a tree, by slow advances, and after much endurance, to some little eminence of terrestrial felicity. Smiling and satisfied, he looks around him upon his state, and fancies it to be established beyond the reach of accident. He promises to himself a secure and permanent enjoyment of it, in unbroken ease, and unruffled tranquillity. But, alas! while he is thus rejoicing in his lot, and encouraging his soul to take its fill of mirth; at the time when he is *flourishing like the green bay tree**, and bearing all his honours thick

* Psalm xxxvii. 35.

about his head; *while his root is spread upon the waters, and the dew lies all night upon his branch**,—an unexpected storm of adversity strips him of his pride; losses deprive him of his abundance; some member of his family departs from the paths of virtue; health declines; friends are taken away:—*We all do fade as a leaf.*

3. By far the most obvious comparison, however, suggested by the words of the text, and not less by the present surrounding appearances of nature, relates to the termination of human existence. *As of the green leaves on a thick tree, says the Wise Man, some fall and some grow, so is the generation of flesh and blood; one cometh to an end, and another is born†.* I do not here stop to direct attention to those rough and untimely vicissitudes of atmosphere, which so often disappoint the promises of spring, or lay low the pride of a more advanced season; although a parallel might well be drawn betwixt these occurrences, and the accidents which arrest youth and manhood in their course; and a warning deduced to youth and manhood, on the precariousness of their hopes of life. I likewise forbear to take more than a passing notice of that thinly-scattered, yet, itself, brown and fading part of the foliage, which

* Job, xxix. 19.

† Eccles. xiv. 18.

survives the first rough breath of winter, while all the ground beneath is covered with a waste of leaves; an appearance which might, without impropriety, be compared to those persons far advanced in years, who, although awfully warned by aches, and feebleness, and decrepitude, the sure intimations and monitors of approaching dissolution;—though perceiving that numbers of their contemporaries have been laid low, and that they are themselves left alone of all their generation, are still found to cling to the world, and to its vanities, with all the wonted fond tenacity of youth, forgetful of the slightness of their tenure in life, and unmindful how unavoidably and how speedily they must follow all those who are now laid insensible in the dust around them.

I seek to hasten on to the contemplation of that closing scene, in which all are equally comprehended and concerned. You observe, that in nature the bud and the blossom, the early and the later leaf, differ but in the periods of their fall. At length, all meet and mingle. The cold blast of winter arrives, and leaves not one of them behind. How melancholy, and yet how just a picture of that havoc, of that unsparing, universal desolation, which death brings amongst the generations of men! Thus is it with the infant, who breathed

but for an hour; the youth, whose career was stopped in its outset; the full-grown man, who perished in the midst of his strength; and him whose fourscore years lingered out to the last in labour and sorrow. The storm of general dissolution has passed over their heads, and scattered them together upon the earth. They all do fade as a leaf. Together they strew the valley of the shadow of death, alike *subdued by Him who hath put all things under his feet* *. Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of misery;—he cometh up and is cut down *like a flower* †;—he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

Having thus shortly noticed the several applications, of which the figurative words of the Prophet will admit, I shall now lay before you a few plain reflections pointed out to the mind by each of these applications respectively.

1. If our devotion, our good resolutions, our moral conduct, be of themselves unstable, as they have been described, and as in truth we know them to be, what indispensable occasion have we for the grace of Heaven, to support our languishing piety, to confirm our wavering resolves, and to assist our endangered virtue! Is it not then our interest to pay a diligent

* 1 Cor. xv. 25.

† Burial Service.

and punctual attendance on all the ordinances which the Almighty has established, as the regular means of obtaining that needful reinforcement? Undoubtedly beings so feeble and so frail should ever carefully seek for the support of God, not only while, but WHERE, he may be found. They should call upon his name by fervent prayer, at stated and regular periods;—they ought to ponder on his law, to frequent his house, to approach his sacred altar. By these means, while the self-righteous, who trust in their own strength for steadfastness in the observance of their vows, become the sport and victim of every temptation, and, to adopt the language of the holy Psalmist, *resemble the chaff which the wind driveth away**—it will be justly and happily said of every individual among these more humble and earnest worshippers, *Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is;—for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river;—and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green;—and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit* †.

2. As this figurative description of the effects of divine grace may well be applied to other advantages, enjoyed by the servants of God,

* Psalm i. 4.

† Jer. xvii. 7, 8.

it conducts us back to the second point noticed, namely, to those sudden and awful reverses of worldly prosperity we so often witness, as suggested by the fall of the leaf. A view of our condition, this, which surely ought to recommend to us an uniform cultivation of piety and true holiness. For as godliness, we know, hath the promise of the life that now is, may we not reasonably expect that they who practise it will be more securely protected from the instability of fortune, beneath the shadow of Omnipotence and divine love, than unrighteous men, who boldly abuse the mercies, and provoke the displeasure of their Creator. The history of human life, indeed, too plainly shows, that, for wise reasons, it enters not into the plan of Providence to shelter the righteous, on all occasions, from the tempests of the present scene; yet it is, nevertheless, still their wisdom and best interest, *not, until they die, to remove their integrity from them**;—to the end that, if disappointed in their hopes of earthly happiness, they may infallibly secure to themselves a far richer reversion of joy, in that new Eden, that fair Paradise, where no rough storm of adversity approaches, and where eternal summer prevails. Let the adopted language of the Prophet then be their fixed determination:—*Although the fig-tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be on the vine;—although the labour of the olive fail,*

* Job, xxvii. 5.

and the fields yield no meat, yet will they rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation.*

Let them wait with patience, and in confident hope, for the certain, though delayed, consummation of their felicity; not repining or distrusting when their eyes shall behold the temporary triumphs of the impenitent:—since, however, these may flourish for a season, it shall fare with them in the end according to the prophecy of Ezekiel:—*Behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither when the east wind bloweth on it? It SHALL wither in all the leaves of her spring†*;—or, in the similar metaphorical language of the Apostle James, *As the flower of the grass they shall pass away; for the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, than it withereth the grass, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth ‡*.—*With the righteous, saith David, it is not so; his leaf shall not wither; and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper §*:—beyond all doubt, brethren, it shall ultimately prosper, either in the present or in a better existence.

3. Of that better existence, as strong an assurance as any presented to the mind by natural religion, is afforded in the reflections arising

* Habbak. iii. 17.

† Ezek. xvii. 9.

‡ James, i. 11.

§ Psalm i. 3.

out of the last branch of the subject, in which the fading glories of the year were regarded in their resemblance to the close of human life.—For as the sear and withered foliage of autumn exhibits to us a striking similitude of mortality; as the lifeless vegetation of winter represents in a forcible manner the house appointed for all living; so the reappearance of the foliage, and the returning life of vegetation, in the cheerful and opening season of the year, may be contemplated as holding forth to the departing spirit, the prospect and earnest of its awakening to a better existence.

For the gloomy reign of this melancholy period does not endure for ever:—pass over our heads but a few short months, and (to resume the language of the sacred writings) *Lo! the winter shall be passed, and the rains over and gone:—the flowers shall again appear on the earth; the time of the singing birds shall be come, and the vines, with the tender herbs, shall give a good smell**. —Yes! pass over us but a few short months, and the storms will be called away to their prisons, while warmer winds shall wake the spring:—the snows of winter will melt before the sun, and the rivers again flow softly to the ocean.—Then shall the earth bring forth her increase, and the young and bounding flocks shall rejoice

* Cantic. ii. 11.

upon her hills :—the naked branches will put forth their buds, and every green and tender herb of the field will once more fill the air with its fragrance.

Emblems of a resurrection !—Happy intimations, given by the God of nature prior to revelation ;—and since revelation has appeared, subsidiary to it,—that the sleep of death is not eternal. For shall no light and joy of spring, may we not with confidence ask the unbeliever, visit, in like manner, the intellectual world?—*If there be hope of a tree when it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not fail**, shall man lie down to rise no more, to cease from the fair existence which he has enjoyed for so little a while, and to be blotted from this universe, of which he has seen so small a part?—If a plant, without reason, without feeling, without belief in a God, without hope or knowledge of futurity—if **THIS** become lifeless and yet live again, shall he who is the noblest work of creation, formed after the image of his Almighty Sovereign, be crushed with all his hopes, and feelings, and energies, and living faculties, and capacities of interminable improvement, into a narrow cell, from which he must never again come forth?

* Job, xiv. 7.

Peace, babbling Infidel! *Thou fool!*—*the grain which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die**:—wherefore, then, should it seem with thee a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead†? That the recovered life of vegetation, ‘the freshening meadow, and the bursting wood,’ afford to man the promise of an existence beyond the grave, is indeed a conclusion intimated by the religion of nature. Something, however, it must be owned, was still wanting, to render the fact incontrovertibly certain:—for although the general aspect of the vegetable tribes, which seem to die with the parting, and to revive with the rising year, might fully justify the inference in any reasonable mind, the captious or doubtful might, perhaps, object, in alluding to the express words of our text, that those identical leaves which have fallen and perished, do not THEMSELVES resume their freshness, but that it is another generation which flourishes on their branches.

This defect of proof has been supplied by the word of God, and the dim lamp of surmise has given place to the dayspring of assurance from above.—Go then, O thou of little faith, and first behold the flower which springs over the sepulchre, appearing to say, even to unenlightened reason, *O Death, where is thy victory?*—

* 1 Cor. xv. 36.

† Acts, xxvi. 8.

From the book of nature repair to the book of revelation;—from plausible conjecture, to infallible certainty. There thou wilt discover thine own resurrection established upon the fact of the resurrection of thy Lord:—still, however, in metaphorical allusion so these same remarkable appearances of nature—*Christ the first fruits;—and afterwards, they that are Christ's, at his coming**.

Thus confidently assured of a future state of existence, see that thou be ever able to look forward to the transition with a well-grounded expectation of its conducting to happiness. Placing thy firm reliance on the Saviour who hath led the way to it, be faithful unto death, and be not weary in well-doing;—that thy immortal spirit, like a tree that has been removed from a bleak to a genial climate, may be taken from this lower world of clouds and tempests, to enjoy, through endless ages, a kinder sky, and to spread out to infinite perfection.

* 1 Cor. xv. 23.

S E R M O N IX.

ON GRADATIONS IN FUTURE HAPPINESS OR MISERY.

REVELATIONS, CHAP. XX. PART OF VERSE 12.

And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

THAT we ought to regard our good actions, our BEST and PUREST actions, as affording no ground for a claim to eternal happiness; and that the most righteous are saved, not by their own righteousness, but solely through the merits of the ever-blessed Redeemer, is the grand and leading principle of revealed religion. From this truth, however, it has been hastily inferred, that since the best morality is an inadequate price of salvation, ALL holiness is ALIKE insignificant in the eye of Heaven;—that penitence, after a protracted course of iniquity, is no less acceptable than regular obedience;—and that whatever may have been the difference in mental depravity, in the heinousness or the continuance of transgressions, betwixt one class of sinful beings and another, all who believe and return unto God shall, in the end, be

EQUALLY blessed, while all obstinate unbelievers shall together be confounded in one indiscriminating measure and swoop of punishment.

In opposition to this opinion, I shall at this time lay before you such arguments, derived from reason and revelation, as incline me to believe, though with suitable diffidence, that while we certainly obtain the free gift of eternal life, only through the sufficiency of our Saviour Christ, there are nevertheless gradations in our future allotment, thus purchased as it is; and that these will be strictly proportioned to our present improvement of those means of grace which are on earth imparted to us.

1. Reason, that witness of himself which God hath given unto man—that fainter light—that lesser revelation, would calculate upon a retribution commensurate in its degrees with moral worth or turpitude, as appearing the most consistent with the divine attribute of justice. There exists a natural sense of equity in the mind, which dictates, that recompense in futurity will be apportioned, according to our knowledge or ignorance of our duty, to our exemption from temptations, or the magnitude of our dangers;—that flagrant offences ought

to be more severely punished than smaller errors; great excellencies more honoured than inferior good qualities; and, in short, that the number of good or bad deeds, as well as their nature, will be estimated in our great account. The mind revolts at the supposition that good men, like Abel, and Noah, and Enoch, and Joseph, although, by reason of their frailties, unquestionably incapable of working out their own salvation, will enjoy no more of the divine favour than penitents who renounce their evil ways, after having resigned themselves, for a long course of years, to presumptuous and habitual guilt. Even MEN inflict not the same measures of punishment on the great and the petty offender;—they are often observed to mitigate their anger, in consideration of a first or unpremeditated trespass; nor do they equally remunerate two servants, of whom one has proved faithful in few, and the other in many things. Sometimes, it is true, we observe human laws inflicting equal punishments on two individuals, who have perpetrated the same offence, though with different degrees of inward depravity; but as this would not happen could men look into the breast, we may reasonably conclude, that, in such circumstances, a distinction will doubtless be observed by Him unto whom all hearts are open.

And these notions respecting the divine administration appear to be sanctioned by striking facts. In the economy of the PRESENT world, it is most clearly perceived to be a GENERAL law of the Divine Providence, that different degrees of iniquity shall produce, as their natural consequences, nearly proportionate measures of suffering. Does not the dissipated character, even after his reformation, experience the result of the waste he has made, in fortune, in health, in reputation, or in time? Can repentance the most sincere recall his squandered possessions, his broken constitution, his wounded character, or his mispent years? Does not painful regret arise to disturb the peace, which he trusts and believes he has made with God? Is he not often deeply stung by self-reproach on account of the past, though he feels humbly assured that, through Christ, it is forgiven? And in all these respects, does not the intenseness of his sufferings bear SOME relation to the extent of his past circuit in iniquity?— Yet, as this adjustment of woe to guilt, though sufficiently general to be distinctly perceived, is not quite universal, or nicely measured in the present life; we can hardly, I presume, avoid considering it as the intimation or commencement of an all-equitable dispensation, to be unfolded more thoroughly in a subsequent state of being.

2. To these surmises of reason, let us now, in the second place, annex the surer information of Scripture. By a Levitical law, mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy*, it is enjoined, that, *If the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to be beaten according to his fault, by a certain number, namely, of stripes:—*in allusion to which passage, St. Luke † represents our Saviour as declaring, in anticipation of the general judgment, that *the servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with MANY stripes; —and that he who knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.* Here we find that the same amount of transgression will be differently visited on two individuals, such as an Heathen and a Christian, of whom the one has enjoyed ample, and the other slender opportunities of knowledge. Now, if in two cases the retribution will vary, while the trespasses are in themselves the same, it seems impossible not to infer a similar difference in recompense, when, the same means or measures of grace being dispensed, the sum of actual trespasses shall be found unequal.

Again, when our Lord declared to the cities of Galilee, *It shall be more tolerable for Tyre*

* Chap. xxv. 2.

† Chap. xii. 47, 48.

end Sidon in the day of judgment than for you; for if the works which ye witness had been done in them, they would a great while ago have repented:—it is obvious, that in this very phrase MORE TOLERABLE, the same diversity of future allotment is implied;—the same balance of disobedience and suffering.

These passages, I must stop to remark by the way, furnish us with one highly important lesson:—for if evil doers involve themselves in greater condemnation, as the celestial light vouchsafed to them is more clear, how dreadful must be the consequences of OUR impenitence, who are familiar with the full import and tidings of the Gospel;—unto whom its heralds and interpreters, the ministers of God are sent, among whom the word of truth is regularly preached, and whom the Scriptures have taught from our childhood to this day, the terms of salvation, and the issue of obduracy!

But to return:—*My brethren*, writes the Apostle James, *be not many masters, knowing that ye shall receive the GREATER condemnation; for in many things we offend all**. This text likewise admits of being elucidated by another, inculcating the same advice: *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: for with what judgment ye*

* James, iii. 1.

*judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again**. Both passages, I conceive, may be thus paraphrased: If to our other offences, whether of infirmity or presumption, we add an immoderate and unchristian severity towards the faults we witness, there is a tribunal where we too shall receive stricter judgment and heavier condemnation, than those will experience who have drawn over their trespasses the mantle of candour and charity towards their offending brethren.

Various other texts and portions of Scripture, illustrating the same doctrine, either directly or by implication, must, doubtless, rush into the minds of such persons as are at all conversant in the sacred volume. They will recollect, that *to whomsoever much is given, much will be, proportionally, required* †:—that *he who soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and that he who soweth plentifully, shall reap plentifully* ‡:—that *whosoever shall violate the LEAST of the divine commandments, the same shall be called the LEAST in the kingdom of heaven*. Terms of comparison employed in describing our recompense, can only refer to its gradations.

Nor would it be pardonable here to overlook, or to omit mentioning, the well-known parable

* Matt. vii. 1, 2. † Luke, xii. 48. ‡ 2 Cor. ix. 6.

of the distribution of talents; in which one servant is represented as receiving five cities, and another two:—but both in admeasurement to their respective fidelity.

There are, moreover, various orders of spiritual intelligences, cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels, rising one above the sphere and condition of another;—from whence may be inferred an analogous ascending scale in our own glorified condition. Agreeably to this supposition, our Lord declared, that *in his Father's house are many mansions* *. We read also of the *third heavens* †, and of some who stand (comparatively) *without fault, before the throne of God* ‡. It was promised to the Apostles (a manifest token of pre-eminence), that they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel §:—and when, on a different occasion, they inquired who should be the greatest in their Master's kingdom, our Saviour acquainted them ||, (not that no one should be greater than another, but) that *HE should excel in greatness who should prove the most faithful in obedience*.—John, we know, was distinguished as the disciple whom Jesus particularly loved ¶:—to what then but to some superiority in holiness can his enjoyment of an extraordinary portion of the divine favour

* John, iv. 2.

† 2 Cor. xii. 2.

‡ Rev. xiv. 5.

§ Luke, xxii. 30.

|| Matt. xviii. 1.

¶ John, xiii. 23.

be attributed?—and may not recompense in this, as in every other instance, be fairly supposed to be commensurate with favour? To all these proofs, the passage from which our text is extracted, may here, with propriety, be subjoined: *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;—and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.* For surely, if the allotment of retribution is to be measured according to the works of men, its quantities must be as unequal in different cases, as the shades of vice and virtue, in different characters, are diversified.

Having thus endeavoured to establish the doctrine of distinctions in eternal reward and punishment, on the basis of reason and Scripture, it only now remains for me to make a practical application of it.

I must premise, however, that an assent to this article of belief is beset with several dangers, against which it is of the utmost moment that a serious caution should be offered. Let me beseech you then to beware, in admitting this delicate doctrine, of considering works as in themselves worth any thing,—as in the smallest degree establishing *a right* to remuneration in

the sight of a pure God. There is no man who, honestly communing with his own conscience, will not own, as the result of the conference, that if God were to deal strictly with him according to his works, independently of any mediatorial interposition, all his thoughts of greater or inferior degrees of happiness would be lost in one haunting, terrifying apprehension—the dread of certain, and well-merited punishment. He would feel that it is of the tender compassion of God that he is not consumed*; and prostrating himself before the throne of the Omnipotent Judge, he would lift up his hands, and only implore for mercy. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant*, he would cry, *for in thy sight shall no man living be justified* †. To any then who shall entertain the presumptuous conception,—who shall admit the palpable and deplorable error—that they are running, if I may so speak, a debtor and creditor account with their Maker; and that the whole or any portion of their eternal happiness is a possession of their own achievement, I would earnestly recommend a constant and deep consideration of the two following passages of Scripture:—*What hast thou that thou didst not receive* ‡? and, *After ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants* §. Admit, however, that our

* Lament. iii. 22.

† Psalm cxliii. 2.

‡ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

§ Luke, xvii. 10:

imperfect services are received through Christ our Mediator,—and it will not then seem inconsistent with these sentiments to suppose that God will vouchsafe a greater or smaller measure of his favour,—freely given though it be to all,—as, obedient to the impulses of his sacred Spirit, we have, more or less, risen superior to our inborn corruption, and approximated to his nature in holiness.

Another danger generated by this doctrine is that of our resting satisfied with inferior degrees of obedience. If, as the world is found, we perceive or imagine ourselves to excel the multitude in the discharge of duty, we are in the greatest hazard of saying within our own hearts; “ ’Tis well:—we are secure of obtaining SOME place in Heaven;—we may with safety, therefore, now leave something undone, or not trouble ourselves about higher attainments:—it were enough only to have escaped destruction;—it will be ABUNDANT happiness to be but a doorkeeper in the celestial temple of our Almighty Father;—let us forego, then, the EXCESSES of future felicity, and content ourselves with inferior remuneration, that we may avoid, as much as may be, the painful restraints of self-denial, and fully enjoy the present world without altogether forfeiting the next.” To the case of individuals who may adopt this reasoning, the Scriptures, as in the preceding

instance, make pointed applications. *The most righteous*, it is said, *shall SCARCELY be saved*;—*where then shall the deliberate sinner appear**?—*Shall we continue in sin*, exclaims St. Paul, *that grace may abound? God forbid* †.—*I think not*, writes the same Apostle, *that I have already attained* ‡:—*I forget what is behind; I press on to perfection* §. But chiefly be it remembered, as the most serious truth, that though the Gospel of Christ offers happiness to the penitent, no portion of that happiness can be expected by the presumptuous transgressor,—let him offend but even in ONE point.

Again; a mercenary service, in opposition to that holiness which results from the love of God, is likewise to be apprehended as a perversion of the doctrine before us. On this head I shall shortly remark, that it is impossible, on every occasion, to introduce in one discourse all the incitements to Christian obedience. In persuading men, by describing the terrors of the Lord, and by representing him as a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, I do not deny that the pure and genuine love of the Divinity is the noblest and most generous motive that can sway the breast of man—the motive ever to be kept uppermost in the thoughts.

* 1 Pet. iv. 18.

‡ Phil. iii. 12.

† Rom. vi. 1.

§ James, ii. 10.

This part of our subject would, however, be left incomplete, if we should fail to add, that the opposite opinion, which confounds the distinctions of reward and punishment, is pregnant no less with dangers of its own. Might it not, if admitted, tend to wear away, in some degree, the acute delicacy of conscience with respect to individual trespasses? Is there no risk of its emboldening the sinner to proceed from smaller errors to greater crimes? to imagine that the one will be as easily forgiven as the other;—that one more sin added to the heap, and one more to that, can be of little consequence, since all are to be washed away together in redeeming blood;—or even to arrive at the fatal delusion, that since works, in regard to their diversities, are a dust in the scale, a nothing in his account—an increased earnestness in faith, devotion, and zeal, will compensate some relaxation in his moral services?

1. Our doctrine appearing to be sufficiently guarded by these preliminary remarks, I shall now proceed to entreat the young and yet unviolated to remain in the house of their heavenly Father—to be uniformly steady to the dictates of principle—to resist that specious lure of Satan, which decoys them away from the path of rectitude, by persuading them, that, on their return, their faith and penitence will fully re-establish them in their former condition. Repentance

would, indeed, (glorified be the name of God!) restore them, through Christ, to the divine favour;—but let them be assured that it would not restore them to that ENTIRE blessedness which they enjoyed prior to their going astray. The fatted calf is slain for the recovered prodigal, who was dead, and is alive;—was lost, and is found*:—his return is welcomed with a robe, a ring, the festivity and jubilee of a night;—still, nevertheless, he has squandered his portion;—though pardoned and received with joy, he is poorer than his elder brother;—nor shall he again DIVIDE the inheritance with him who relinquished not his paternal roof, and to whom, therefore, belongeth all that his father hath.

In a word, the mercy of the Father of mercies consists in receiving his penitents at all:—did he place them on a level with those who, excepting the errors, unavoidably incident to the most uniformly faithful, have not wandered widely from their home, his mercy would seem to encourage a deliberate enjoyment of the pleasures of sin for a season. Let those then, who hitherto have been little,—(little comparatively,)—tainted by actual guilt, still beware of contracting its stains:—since, even if their resolutions of future penitence were to be realized (resolutions, however, which sudden death, or delirious sickness, or inveterate habits, or har-

* Luke, xv.

dened iniquity, may defeat), they would find, if there be truth in what has at this time been advanced, that, having lost some opportunities which, through grace, they might have improved, they had forfeited some rewards, which it was in their power to have obtained. Theirs be (as far as human weakness can effect) a preservation of the inestimable treasure of their innocence, an uninterrupted continuance in obedience; and to them will belong the richest of patrimonies: even *all that their Father hath*.

2. I would, in the next place, solemnly entreat the transgressor, every one who has unfortunately been tempted from the right path, that he lose no moment in arising and coming to his Father—not only because a moment may close his probation, but also because each moment of delayed amendment is a new abridgment of that quantity of happiness, which Christian faith and penitence may yet procure for him; or,—painful alternative!—a fearful increase of that eternal sorrow which is the wages of obstinate rebellion. If he has been heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, it is surely full time to think of diminishing the heap; or, at least, of ceasing to add to it. The gates of Mercy are still open: the aids of grace are yet vouchsafed. By redoubling his care, by stretching the sinews of exertion, in the love and service of God, and of his neighbour, he may greatly

retrieve his past failure; he may regain much of his lost ground; he may recover something of his forfeited felicity. Perhaps he may tread on the steps of the regular and steady: by a very anxious and diligent acceleration in obedience, it may yet be his, to overtake in the way some, whose services, though uniform, are less strenuous than those on which he is competent to determine and to enter.

3. Lastly, let us all consider every DAY of life as a means of grace, which, if rightly improved, advances us a step in the divine favour:—if abused, infallibly brings us nearer to ruin, or sinks us deeper in despair. Each year, and month, and minute, is of incalculable worth, as elevating or depressing the candidate for immortality. Every individual good action, each passion we suppress, each temptation we resist, each counsel we offer, each sorrow we alleviate, every the slightest expression of Christian good-will, every mite bestowed from a pure motive, has a certain determination upon futurity. Not a cup of cold water shall lose its particular reward*, nor an idle word be omitted in our final account †. Not the most trivial effort of self-denial, not the slightest indiscretion, shall fail to raise or to lower the scale of our everlasting condition. A faithful witness will record the whole, with an unerring pen, in the

* Matt. x. 42.

† Matt. xii. 36.

books which shall be opened before the Lord; and we shall be judged out of the things which are written in the books—judged *according to our works*.

Can we have a more cogent inducement to being perpetually vigilant; to fleeing from lesser as well as greater evils; to cultivating all the minuter graces, as well as the more essential virtues of the Christian life;—in one word, to being what we ought to be, by the divine help, at all times, and in all situations; in youth as in age; in health as in sickness; in safety as in danger; in the world as in the house of God? By thus receding from the way of destruction, and advancing in the humble imitation of the ever-blessed Pattern, we doubt not that some disciples have rendered their remuneration, not only to be confidently expected, but exceedingly great; their election not only sure, but glorious; their labour not merely not in vain in the Lord, but productive of a rich and abundant harvest. By progressive gradations in Christian obedience, they have risen to a more intimate enjoyment of that blessedness, with which the Deity is supremely and perfectly encompassed, because HE IS PERFECTLY good.

Such aspiring views as these, however, suit not, perhaps, the circumstances of the generality of Christians. Frail, weak, erring, and

far from excellence, we shall make a more becoming improvement of the present subject, by considering every one of our better actions as instrumental under our Redeemer, in removing us from the lost, rather than in advancing us among the happy: as abating, in some degree, the divine displeasure, due to our innumerable faults: as rendering us, in some small measure, less unworthy of the mighty deliverance which Christ, our strength, hath wrought for us. Happy, richly, undeservedly happy, if, through his mediation, our imperfect obedience shall be deemed acceptable in the sight of Heaven, if, by surrendering to him our souls, by giving up our lives to his service, we can at all warrant our hopes of salvation in his blood, and obtain any, though it were but the lowest place in his Father's kingdom.

S E R M O N X.

ON THE ORIGIN AND PREVALENCE OF EVIL.

ISAIAH, CHAP. XLV. VERSE 7.

I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things.

THAT the world in which we are placed abounds with evil, the melancholy report of all ages has proclaimed. The complaint has been common to every rank and condition of life:—to the young, the rich, and the powerful, not less than to the aged, the indigent, and the weak. Deeply as men have deplored the fact, they have been equally perplexed in their endeavours to account for it. Could not the Creator have prevented this imperfection in his works? and, if he is infinitely good, wherefore did he permit it to exist?—Might he not, if he pleased, have made all men, and all animals, to be happy? and as it was easy to his power, would it not have been more consistent with his benevolence, if he had formed the light without a succession of darkness, and ordained peace, without creating evil?

These questions led many of the wise men of old, who were not visited by the light of revelation, and likewise a particular sect of the early Christians*, to adopt the hypothesis of two first principles of things, or two eternal beings, a good and an evil power, who, as they supposed, were perpetually contending with and counteracting each other. They thought that they did honour to the object of worship, by ascribing to a different and an adverse agent, whatever they deemed irreconcilable to his benevolence, and a blot upon his perfection. It did not occur to them, that, by this conjecture, they actually curtailed his attributes:—that in seeking to exalt his goodness, they were denying his sovereign omnipotence. In later times, and even in our own days, a similar view of the prevalence of evil has led some persons to disbelieve the existence, others to question the providence, of God; and many who cannot withhold assent from either, to murmur and despond under his dispensations.

We discover in the text, that the evil which is found in the world, exists there by the command or permission of the Divinity. *I create evil.*

* Vid. Law's edition of King on Evil, p. 93. Lucretius, lib. ii. v. 180.—The sect alluded to in the text, I need hardly say, was that of the Manichæans. See Bayle's Dict. article Manichees.

I do this, saith the Lord. My object, then, I shall briefly announce to be an endeavour to vindicate the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty in so remarkable an exertion of his power. With this view I propose, on the present occasion, to show,

1st, That the quantity of existing evil is not so great as, at first view, it may appear to be :

2dly, That whatever evil afflicts the human race, is all, in one way or other, of their own procuring :—and,

3dly, That by the gracious interference of Providence, it tends to a happy issue ;—to an issue which, to say the least of it, counterbalances the previous evil.

1st. It will greatly clear the way in this discussion, if we shall be able, in the outset, to satisfy ourselves that the quantity of evil is much less than, on a superficial view, might be imagined :—that the shades of adversity are not so deep as they appear to be, in the eye of a hasty observer.—And first, we may remark, that, by a wise appointment of Providence, scenes of distress are made to strike our minds more forcibly, and to awaken a far livelier fellow-feeling in our breasts than any species of FELICITY which we witness :—and for this obvious reason—that distress stands in need of that

active consolation and relief, which our compassion will naturally prompt, while happiness is more independent of sympathy. Add to this, that misery, in consequence of the same occasion for the participation of social natures in its feelings, is much more clamorous, and therefore more noticed, than satisfaction. And the sum of evil has been still further exaggerated by writers who were aware that the tale of woe would find a chord more responsive to it in the human heart, than any which vibrates in unison with the voice of joy; as well as by many mistaken devotees, who have esteemed a gloomy discontent with the present life, as essential to Christian piety.

To any calm and unprejudiced observer, however, the latent, but multiplied, satisfactions of mankind, will not fail to discover themselves; and he will learn to look up with confidence to that all-gracious Being, who, although he suffers, for wise ends, the existence of darkness and evil, creates more of light than of darkness, and more of peace than of evil. Such an observer will discover, that, in the natural world, and with some allusion to the literal sense of the text, if the radiance of the sun be sometimes withdrawn, it is sent to shine forth in other climes;—it leaves behind it a calm and soothing twilight, and a season

sued to repose: while, to light the traveller on his journey, or to guide the mariner through the deep, the fair host of heaven illuminate the firmament, and pour down their beams on the darkness of night. He will reflect, that if the evil of war be often commissioned from above, to scourge the nations of the earth, there is on the whole, throughout the globe, an equal balance of peace: that, in modern times, Christianity has, in many essential respects, mitigated the horrors of warfare; and that a state of hostilities, however to be deplored, is not to be accounted wholly destitute of benefit, since it serves to stimulate an industry which shall meet the increased demands of the revenue; and to prevent or check that voluptuousness and love of the world, to which peace, it cannot be denied, is but too favourable. To nearly all natural evils, indeed, a compensation may be discovered. Poverty is exempt from the anxieties and the fears of opulence, and is animated by hopes to which opulence is a stranger. Solid and useful sense is usually found, where a brilliant imagination is wanting; while an absence of this useful quality is as often supplied, by a happy unconsciousness of the defect. It is the helplessness of men which is the cement of civil society; and their ignorance which unlocks the rich and various pleasures of novelty, curiosity, and progressive improvement.

With respect to the sum of evil, as generally observable, we cannot but acknowledge that there is, on the lowest calculation, as much of health and serenity as of sickness and storm; more than seven years of plenty for every seven of famine: and when we turn our contemplation to the moral world, if it be found to exhibit too frequent instances of private animosity and contention, it will appear to be the theatre of many more civilities, hospitalities, compassions, and friendships. To these remarks it deserves to be added, that as the private misfortunes of men occupy but a small portion of life, it is seldom that they all arrive together; and that, by advancing in succession, they are the more easily endured.

No small portion of the distress of which we complain is ideal. We fruitlessly harass our minds with apprehending calamities, that are, in ordinary calculation, by no means likely to befall us; nor less in deploring circumstances in our lot, which contain no hardship, but in the views of our distempered fancy. Possessed of all the necessaries of life, we idly bewail our want of its superfluities. We are continually losing sight of the good which is in our power; and toiling in pursuit of some vain shadow, to which we fondly imagine happiness to be attached.

We are, further, apt, in contemplating the misfortunes of our brethren, to form a false estimate of the real evil of their condition, by confining our attention to their misfortunes solely; while we pay no regard to the various alleviations, which often go far towards compensating or softening them. But if we took into our account, as in truth we ought to take, that not unfrequent natural insensibility which disregards the assault of trouble;—that buoyancy of the spirits and fire of hope which surmounts it;—and length of time, which reconciles men to their sufferings,—and necessary toil, which leaves but little leisure for brooding over them: if we reckoned up the soothing consolations of friendship, and the thousand tender nameless services performed towards the unfortunate by their kindred;—if we considered those medicines, so potent in many cases, to administer peace amidst the depths of tribulation, I mean the secret pleasures of a serene conscience, and, above all, that holy and steadfast principle of faith, which implicitly trusts in the providence of God, and calmly submits to his severest chastisements;—if, my brethren, we thus fairly contemplated affliction, the face of affairs would brighten up to our view, and we should acknowledge that the Almighty Governor has left upon his creation, a deeper stamp and signature of his benevolence, than of any other of his attributes.

It is, indeed, a common remark, and deserving of its due weight, that although nothing be more frequent than complaints of personal unhappiness, there are few or none who would willingly exchange their condition, including all its good together with its evil, for any other that might be submitted to their preference*. Doubtless, then, in EVERY condition, there must exist consolations, which escape the superficial or the melancholy observer,

After all, however, it cannot be denied, that the world contains much real distress; to account for which, and to reconcile the permission of it with the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Divine Being, it will now be proper,

II. In the second place, to direct attention to its origin. Now we are distinctly informed in the sacred volume, that *God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men* †. When he first called the human race into existence, he designed them to be happy, and he made them so. Had our first parents then, and had all their posterity, retained their original innocence, their happiness likewise would have been certainly perpetuated. The world would have still

* Vos hinc discedite mutatis partibus; Eja
Quid statis? Nolunt,

† Lament. iii. 33.

bloomed as the garden of Eden; and neither sickness, nor anxiety, nor sorrow, nor death, would ever have found a place in it. But Adam, having violated the stipulated condition on which Paradise and its felicity were secured to him, himself incurred, and entailed on his descendants, the punishment which the Almighty had denounced on disobedience. And lest these descendants should complain of any injustice, in THEIR being doomed to suffer for the offence of their forefather, they all (all at least who have lived sufficiently long to be conscious of their sufferings, and to be capable of complaining,—all therefore with whom our argument is now concerned) have followed his footsteps in the ways of sin, and thus more fully justified the decree of Heaven. Here then, my friends, we discover the ample source of the varied miseries with which the present life abounds. *By one man's disobedience sin came into the world, and misery and death by sin**. Death, we are elsewhere informed, is the wages of sin: and so are sickness, sorrow, misfortune of every kind. NATURAL evil is the result and recompense of MORAL evil; and moral evil was introduced by man's wilful transgression. Thus far, then, with respect to every species of evil, man may be pronounced the author of his own tribulation;—how presumptuous, therefore, to

* Rom. v.

arraign the goodness of God, as if he originally willed that his creatures should live to suffer!

The evils of our condition are observed to be of two kinds;—such as befall us by the established course of nature, and can be prevented by no foresight or exertion on our part, and such as we deliberately bring down upon our own heads, by the abuse of our free will. It is manifest, that to both these descriptions of distress, the foregoing observations are applicable. Yet, if the former, the unavoidable evils of existence (which are the only direct punishment of the fall), be separated from the others, and considered by themselves, they will appear of very insignificant amount, when compared with the general mass of surrounding trouble. The loss of friends after a long enjoyment of their society; a few acute diseases, and rarely occurring accidents; a subjection to the inclemency of seasons, and similar occasional inconveniences, together with removal from life, for the most part, in extreme old age; these, I think, would constitute nearly the whole sum:—a sum which the most impatient would hardly account sufficient to embitter the present existence, or to invalidate a confidence in the divine benevolence. They dwindle, indeed, into nothing, when we remember that the sin of Adam does

not, of itself, inflict a punishment beyond the grave; and that an eternity of unutterable and unsullied happiness is opened to all his children. But by far the greater part of the evils of which we complain, are such as even under the forfeiture incurred by the fall, the race of Adam have no occasion to suffer;—are under no necessity of suffering:—such as the Almighty appoints, or permits, only as the scourge of their own transgressions; and such as, under the ordinary aids of grace, their own prudence or principle might easily have shunned.

Need I refer, for proof of this assertion, to all those dire hostilities amongst nations, which, from the beginning, have converted the earth into a scene of blood,—an Aceldama; have laid waste its most fertile provinces, destroyed or reduced to misery millions of its inhabitants, and filled the eyes of parents and of widows with tears?—Need I refer to the countless multitude of private animosities: to the jealousies and strifes in families and neighbourhoods, which engender so many reciprocal injuries;—or to those baleful effects of personal envy and resentment, which administer as much pain to him who harbours, as to him who is the object of such malignant affections? O! you who arrogate the name of Christians, a name designed

to spread peace throughout the globe, where is the reply of conscience, when you are asked, *Whence come wars and private variances amongst you? Not originally from God, as a necessary chastisement of the fall—but come they not hence;—even from your own lusts*?*

Sorrows and death, it is not denied, were brought into the world by the sin of our first parents:—but have not sorrows been multiplied, has not death been rendered more formidable, by the voluntary depravity of us, their posterity? Do not our intemperance, our imprudence, and the irritation occasioned by our harbouring the vindictive passions (I am now speaking in relation to the present life), fill to the brim with bitterness that cup, into which no more than a drop of gall was necessarily mingled, as the recompense of original sin?—do not these combine to sharpen the sting of death, and to accelerate the victory of the grave?—And then, forsooth, we must murmur against God, as if HE had called us into life to be miserable; and wantonly, like an austere tyrant, broken that fortune,—impaired that constitution, that character, that peace of mind, which frugality, sobriety, circumspection, integrity—strengthened by those influences which he did not withhold—might easily have preserved entire! *The*

* James, iv. 1.

foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

A question, however, yet remains, to which it may be of consequence to reply. Why did God, the unbeliever has often urged, and even the humble Christian may be disposed to inquire, why did the Almighty make man a free agent? especially if he foresaw, as the Christian system supposes him to have done, that his creatures would wofully abuse their free-agency, and in this manner involve themselves in many and deep afflictions?—Wherefore did his goodness make us at all liable to transgression, or appoint that the transgressions of his creatures should necessarily draw after them so many deplorable consequences?—In less popular language, why does MORAL evil, the source of natural evil, exist? Might not the Supreme Governor have created us wholly impeccable; and in this manner secured the continuance of primeval happiness?—My brethren, it becomes us, in stating such suppositions, to beware of pushing our inquiries too daringly, lest the creature should be found presuming to ask the Creator, with dissatisfaction, *Why hast thou made me thus †?*

* Prov. xix. 3.

Ἐξ ἡμέων γὰρ φασι κακ' ἔμεναι; οἱ δὲ κ' αὐτοὶ
Σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὑπὲρ μόνον ἄλλῃ ἔχουσιν.

Odyssey, lib. i. l. 33.

† Rom. ix. 20.

Revelation informs us, however, and, so far as this guide is vouchsafed, we are permitted and encouraged to investigate, that the design of God, in calling us, as intelligent beings, into existence, was to make us happy, in a certain degree, by an exertion of intelligence; that is, through the medium, and on the condition of obedience to his laws. Here, then, a choice betwixt compliance and contempt is pre-supposed:— and God kindly attached certain penalties to disobedience, in order to teach his creatures to avoid it. The existence of evil, therefore, as a scourge of sin, so far from being an impeachment of the divine goodness, is a proof of it.— It cannot be said to have been, at the first, unavoidable; and man, in incurring it, had himself to blame. And this is true, in reference, not only to the sin of Adam, but to the particular transgressions of all of his posterity. The evils which these transgressions are known to produce, if considered in the light of warnings, will appear to be benevolent interpositions: and it must still be kept in remembrance, that, with reference to our own trials, by abstaining from the transgressions, we are able to avoid their consequences.

The existence of evil, then, being absolutely necessary, to determine the choice of intelligent beings, whose happiness was to be reconciled

with their free decision, their endurance of it, on being convicted of guilt before God, became the painful but just result. To all this I will briefly add, that a higher degree of happiness is provided for intelligent beings, in the consciousness of their having conquered in a struggle;—obeyed divine commands, and complied with divine influences, when resistance to both was in their option,—than could result, if I may use the expression, to sensitive machines, from reflecting on a virtue to which they had been blindly and irresistibly impelled*.

III. But let us now, in the last place, remark the further, the superlative goodness of our Almighty Parent. For by a contrivance of his providence, never to be sufficiently admired, it is happily ordained, that even these necessary inflictions should conduce to the final good of his creatures;—and to good, which, on the very lowest calculation, fully counterbalances all the previous evil.

Both the inevitable misfortunes of existence, and those which are the immediate consequences of personal imprudence, are directed by the hand of an overruling Providence to the production of ultimate good. To begin with the slighter evils incident to our state: the thunder-

* See Law on King, p. 345.

storm, we may observe, clears the firmament. The devastating hurricane purifies the atmosphere from noxious vapours. Those clouds of insects which infest the summer (for inconveniencies, as well as misfortunes arising from the fall, may contribute to the elucidation of the argument before us), are known to feed on putrescent substances, and thus to prevent their tainting the air which we respire. Turn, next, to any, it matters not which passage, in the records of civil history. The enthusiastic excursions of the Crusaders into the East, where so many fell victims to famine, the pestilence, and the sword, are ascertained to have been the means of introducing several valuable improvements, in agriculture and the arts of life, into the different countries of Europe; while, by alienating the lands of the smaller feudal despots, they diffused that free commercial spirit, which has, more equally than in preceding ages, distributed comfort amongst all ranks of society. In like manner, prior to that memorable conflagration, which destroyed a large part of the British metropolis, vast numbers were frequently carried off by the plague, nourished, as it was, by the narrowness of our streets:—but the lines of dwellings having been since built more widely apart, that dreadful calamity has happily disappeared. How often has war, kindled by the ambition of mortals, been ren-

dered the awful instrument by which the Almighty punishes, or exterminates a guilty nation!

If we were now to descend to the humbler page of common life, and of daily experience, which is ever open before our eyes, similar instances might easily be produced, to an extent far exceeding our present limits. To select a few at random: is it not obvious to remark, that when prodigality brings on the ruin of one family, it distributes wealth and employment amongst many?—that when, by a decree of Heaven, intemperance shortens human life, it delivers society from the burden of an useless and a noxious member? And, with respect to the personal advantage of the sufferers, if the present prosperity of the comparatively virtuous be uncertain—an often experienced consequence of the fall—their virtue is thereby purified from baser motives, and taught to look for nobler though distant rewards. It is indeed the natural tendency of misfortune of every description, to humble pride, to inspire serious reflection, to detach the soul from sublunary things, and to inculcate a sense of dependance on the Divine Being.—Many of the most exalted and amiable virtues too, which lend a grace to the human character, or which bind man more closely to his brother,—patience, meekness, magnanimity,

compassion, charity, are called into activity by circumstances of distress. The thorns and the thistles, which the earth was condemned to bear, for a perpetual testimony of the sin of Adam, arouse in his descendants the exertions of industry :—and lusty and sun-burnt industry, earning his bread with the sweat of his brow, is the parent of health, of contentment, of cheerfulness ; of all the domestic virtues, and all the tranquil delights. Thus true is it, even in a temporal sense, that he who goeth forth and weepeth, shall doubtless return with gladness, bearing his sheaves with him*.

Once more, how incalculable is the advantage derived by morality, from the shortness and insecurity of human life ! What dissuasive from worldly-mindedness can be more forcible than the consciousness that our sojourning is limited by fourscore years :—what argument more cogent for standing with our lamps continually trimmed, and our loins girded, than the conviction that on any portion of even one of these years, we are unable to reckon with the slightest assurance ? And what, under revelation, is death itself, the grand natural evil which sin hath introduced ?—It is to bid adieu for ever to the place of toil and sorrow, and to be conveyed to a shore of ineffable felicity.—It is to

* Psalm cxxvi. 6.

rest from our labours, and to be blessed in the Lord*.

By such views, then, short-sighted though we be, we are, to a certain length, enabled to develope the designs, and to justify the providence of the Divine Ruler, in the dispensation of adversity:—and there is every reason to believe, that the superior knowledge, which, we trust, is reserved for us in a future state, will afford us ampler, and indeed complete satisfaction, on the same momentous subject. If, in the past history of every one of us, it has occurred, that afflictions, which at one period of life our impatience and impiety perhaps attributed to the wanton caprice of the Divinity sporting with our sufferings, have unexpectedly proved the means and commencement of good, may we not conclude that EVERY OTHER evil, which we endure or witness, but of which we cannot so clearly perceive the beneficial tendency, is, in the same manner, and will at length appear to have been, only a necessary link in that great chain, which conducts to ultimate happiness:—that a time is approaching when all the seeming irregularities in the ways of Divine Providence will disappear; when the high places shall be made plain, and the rough places even; when the fair proportions of order will arise, where we had formerly beheld only confusion;—wis-

* Rev. xiv. 13.

dom, where we had distrusted;—mercy, where we had complained:—when, ashamed of the narrowness of our past views, and of the rashness of our former repinings, we shall discover that all things, even the most calamitous, have wrought together for our greatest possible advantage;—that all the judgments of the Almighty Governor are excellent;—and that, whether for the production of general or individual good, the great plan of Heaven has been the happiest and the best.

The above-mentioned instances, however, of the conversion of evil into good, though far from being unworthy of most serious contemplation, must all be regarded as only minor illustrations of this latter branch of the subject before us, when viewed in comparison with that astonishing fact, the grand and awful mystery of human redemption. No sooner had man fallen, and excluded himself from all hopes of inheriting eternal happiness, than means of recovering his lost condition are revealed to him by the offended, yet merciful Creator. A few short-lived afflictions are awarded, rather as standing memorials, than as an adequate punishment of his guilt:—but the severe aspect of strict justice is softened by the mildness of pardoning love; and the same voice, which pronounces the merited doom, *Dust thou art,*

and unto dust shalt thou return, at the same moment delivers a promise of the Saviour, who shall arise in due time to bruise the serpent's head. The plan of salvation is gradually unfolded in the long progression of succeeding ages, until the full light of the Gospel displays at length to man, as he is fallen and ruined, the sacrifice for sin;—as he is mortal, the vanquisher of death;—as he is depraved and of himself incapable of obedience, the messenger and the giver of grace.

To conclude:—From these reflections let us learn, my fellow-sufferers, to improve our confidence in the divine goodness; to redress, as far as lies within our capacity, the multiform evils that exist around us; and to convert to wise and beneficial purposes, such of these evils as affect ourselves.

1. We have seen, that there is actually far less evil in the world, than man, in his impatience, wildly complains of; or, from a slight examination, is led to conceive: that such as really exists is not wantonly inflicted by God, but is occasioned by human sinfulness;—partly by the original guilt of our first parent, and partly by our own transgressions. We have seen, that as man is an intelligent being, a free agent, and designed to be made happy through

the medium of moral improvement, the existence of a certain portion of evil was necessary, as a warning by which this choice of reason might be determined; and that every affliction which befalls him, whether unavoidable, or procured by himself,—whether the scourge of original or of personal criminality, is transformed by Providence into an eventual benefit, and made to terminate in good. Is there not much here to teach us admiration of the divine wisdom; adoration of the divine goodness;—to rebuke our discontent; to silence our murmurs; to dispel all distrust of the superintendence under which we are placed; and to reconcile us to whatever grievances are mingled in our condition? Surely we ought to love the Lord our God, as a Being who taketh no pleasure in our unhappiness; whose very chastisements, though just, are few,—though necessary, are gentle; and who causes only those tears to flow, which call forth and cherish the fruits of joy.

2. The subject, now considered, ought next to incite us to redress, as far as lies within our power, the numerous evils which we every where behold. We are fully aware of the divine intention, that these sufferings should be no severer than is strictly necessary for effecting their proper object:—and that they should

all terminate in the advantage,—in the happiness of the sufferers. Nay, all the maxims inculcating charitable offices, with which the sacred writings so copiously abound, demonstrate, that a measure of sorrow is permitted to exist, or to continue after having fulfilled its errand of chastisement or amendment, for the express purpose of improving our benevolent affections, as spectators of it, in its removal. If we complain then of the sum of calamity that is in the world, here is a way in which we may diminish it. Almighty God inflicts his own punishments; and appoints us as the instruments of terminating their operation. And if we decline that agency to which we are destined, do we not, in truth, disturb the courses of Providence, obstruct the channels of divine mercy, and unnecessarily multiply afflictions upon the earth? In providing, therefore, bread, and clothing, and instruction, for the hungry, the naked, and the ignorant; in redressing the wrongs of the oppressed, and in consoling the sorrows of the unhappy,—let us learn to perform our office, as almoners of Providence, and as ministers of God, for good unto his creatures.

3. That we should improve to good purposes such evils as affect ourselves, is the last lesson to be mentioned, as growing out of the present subject. It has been already shown, and I

trust satisfactorily, that God, in his wrath, remembereth mercy ;—that he inflicts no calamity willingly or capriciously ; and that in every one of his chastisements there is a design to bless. Now, it is in our power, and it is our duty, to co-operate with this gracious design, in our own afflictions, as well as in the sufferings of our neighbours. And our sorrows, of whatever nature they may have been, will indeed have well accomplished their destined purpose ;—they will be converted into blessings,—they will appear as so many proofs of the divine goodness, if they shall be found to have produced the happy effect, under the grace of God, and through our own humble exertions, of arresting our speed in the career of thoughtlessness,—and weaning us from an over-fondness towards this vain and transitory world—of awakening in our breasts an interest for our grand concern—of leading our penitent steps to the foot of the cross—of elevating our thoughts, and pointing our hopes and affections to the throne and the bosom of God.

Then shall we have ample reason to acknowledge, with a gratitude, issuing from the inmost recesses of our souls, *It is good for us that in time past we have suffered affliction ; since we have thereby known the divine law**. Then shall we

* Psalm cxix. 71.

experience that an ever-gracious Providence makes all events, both distressful and fortunate, to combine silently for the peace and welfare of the faithful; and that the light and momentary afflictions of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory by which, through the merits of Jesus Christ, they will be succeeded.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence come they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest: and he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

• Rev. ch. vii.

S E R M O N XI.

ON THE SPIRITUAL DANGERS OF THE
METROPOLIS*.

PSALM LV. VERSES 10, 11.

Day and night they go about upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof; deceit and guile depart not from her streets.

ALTHOUGH temptation, in its various forms, be incidental to all conditions of life, there are certain situations unfortunately beset with a more than ordinary share of it. Thus spiritual perils are more thickly scattered in the path of the inhabitants of great cities, than in the sequestered and hallowed shade of rural retirement. Since therefore it is our lot, my Christian brethren, to be placed in the midst of these dangers, and probably prevented by our several occupations from retreating to abodes of comparative safety, it is in the highest degree expedient that we should ascertain the nature and extent of the manifold evils with which we are, on all hands, encompassed, to the end that we may, if possible, obviate or abate their influence.

* Preached at the Philanthropic Chapel.

I shall accordingly consider the perils peculiar to a metropolis, as it abounds with objects of attention, as it presents numerous solicitations to pleasure, and as it is extended in size.

I. As a great city abounds with objects of attention, it is natural to suppose, experience indeed too fully evinces, that at best a hasty glance, a slight and imperfect consideration, will be bestowed on the interests of eternity. Where our worldly employment, the concerns of public associations, something ever to be seen, to be heard, and to be talked of;—where ceremony, politeness, friendships, and intercourse at the social board, have all their respective claims upon our notice,—our duties to God, as comprising prayer and praise, and a regular perusal of the sacred writings;—the more religious and serious of our duties towards our neighbour, as stretching out into the details of active assistance, and of charitable visitations, are in danger of occupying but a scanty space.

Amongst these objects, soliciting and distracting the attention,—politics, chiefly owing to our vicinity to the seat of government, and to the absence of agricultural and other field pursuits, not less than to the nature of the intercourse in large societies, which renders conver-

sation on general and public topics, the chief bond of social communication;—politics will, on these accounts, agitate the minds of men, much more than in provincial districts: while a condensed population facilitates assemblies, and combined movements, whether for patriotic or for factious purposes. Amidst all the consequent stir and worldly zeal;—the ardour of public spirit, and the war of tempers,—how is the soft and gentle voice of religion to prevail, by the natural persuasion of its sweetness? Is not her song too likely, if at all regarded, to be heard with indifference, and speedily forgotten, charm she ever so wisely*?

But it is chiefly in the light of obstructions to the duty of self-inspection, and consequently to the amendment of life which it prompts, that I wish to insist at present on these local peculiarities. That seclusion and quietude,—that uniformity of scene,—that stillness of nature,—the regularity of habit, and the freedom from interruption, which render a country residence so favourable to protracted meditation, are, I need hardly say, almost unknown in the centre of a crowded and busied society. Ever tempted abroad by the enticement of novelties offering themselves in endless vicissitude, the mind is but little likely to direct its attention inwards. Every day invited forth by the al-

* Psalm lviii. 5.

luring promise of fresh acquisitions to its information, it will neglect the salutary exercise of examining and converting to a wise use, the treasures it has already collected: still devouring, and never ruminating; still on the wing, and never at rest. Amidst a continual tumult, a variety of avocations, and a succession of objects passing rapidly before the eye, short will be the leisure, weak the inclination, and feeble the power, to settle into a state of mental retrospection. Attention is hurried on from one present object to another; it skims over surfaces, and reposes on nothing:—one scene or occurrence is effaced by that which succeeds:—there is too much of acquisition, and too little of reflection:—and in a word, any effort of patient or of steadfast thought is nearly precluded. A review of the past becomes as a twice-told tale,—as intelligence a day old;—and a vitiated taste, like that of the men of Athens, covets and relishes only what is new.

How unfavourable such circumstances and such habits are to spiritual improvement, will readily be acknowledged by those who remember that all valuable, all earnest, and lasting amendment has ever commenced in devout and deliberate reflection.—*When I thought on my ways, says the royal Psalmist, I turned my feet*

unto the divine testimonies *. A sudden impression may awaken a momentary remorse, even in the most restless and unreflective mind, and lead to single acts of duty, or to a brief and transient season of obedience. But in order to purify the inner man, and thoroughly to rectify the conduct, it is necessary to confirm such casual impressions; to shut our eyes upon the world; to withdraw our attention from surrounding objects; to commune with our hearts, and be still: we must dive into the recesses of our own souls; trace self-delusion through all its wiles, and, by recalling the history of our past failures, ascertain the points to which our penitence must be directed, or on which our caution must be awake. Now is this patient exercise of self-examination natural, is its prevalence to be, in the course of things, expected, amidst the occupations and distractions of a busied metropolis? Too well do we know the contrary. "Nor is it strange (if we may enlarge on the expressions of our poet): motion, concourse, noise, variety—are all combined to scatter us abroad. Thought, outward-bound, neglects our home affairs," and leaves unsearched and unregulated the breast;—the great and the worthiest object of her inquiry. If, therefore, we cannot flatter ourselves that, under such circumstances, the duty of self-inspec-

* Psalm cxix. 59.

tion is likely to be much practised, we must necessarily despair, in an equal degree, of the penitence and obedience which are its results. How can it be hoped, that THEY will deplore past misdoings, who are unable to find any seasonable opportunity for pondering on their sinfulness and danger? that THEY will be apt to improve the disposition, to whom time for acquiring a consciousness of its perverseness is wanting? Is attention to the adornings of the soul to be looked for, from a multitude whose views are continually drawn aside from it? or can it be presumed that those minds will be turned to the divine testimonies, in which impressions are hardly formed when they are effaced; and convictions are forgotten while they are yet fresh; in which compunction, the first movement of religious consideration, no sooner arises, than it is expelled at once, by an host of miscellaneous objects of regard.

II. A variety of dangers may, in the second place, be classed together, as existing, with the greatest force, in a metropolis, in consequence of its abounding, more than any other place of abode, with *invitations to pleasure*.

Where the body is, says the Scriptural proverb, there will the eagles be gathered together *.

In the resort of multitudes and in the seat of

* Matt. xxiv. 29.

wealth, will be collected all the solicitations of luxury. In speaking of these enticements, it seems unnecessary to draw a nice distinction betwixt such as bear the character of guilt upon their forehead, I mean the temptations to intemperance and sensual living, and those manifold calls to amusement, and excitements of artificial wants, which, when considered in themselves, may less merit the imputation of criminality. Both agree, the former, if at all obeyed, and the latter, if immoderately complied with, in giving birth to ostentation, extravagance, levity; in consuming irrecoverable time, in alienating the mind from domestic duties, and in producing that voluptuous and vitiated taste, which indisposes, as well as that entire expenditure of income, which incapacitates their votaries, for discharging the offices of charity.

To the same origin, my brethren, may be traced another evil, which, from its extensive prevalence and serious magnitude, demands particular notice; I mean, an indisposition to genuine piety. Those who are accustomed to flutter, during the week, from one place and scene of entertainment to another (however punctual they may be in external religious exercises), are in no proper frame of mind for the reception of serious impressions; they soon be-

come too apt to regard the house of God as ONE of their entertainments; as that, appropriate to the Sabbath. And their habits of voluptuousness or gaiety having indisposed their minds for whatever is sober and unadorned, for whatever demands a patient exercise of thought, much more for whatever may, in the slightest degree, prove irksome to their feelings, they lose all relish for solid reasoning, for evangelical simplicity, for the plain and sober truth as it is in Jesus; and quickly take offence, when they hear the condemnation, however salutary and necessary, of any of their favourite excesses. They regard the sacred voice of public instruction, as designed, less to meliorate the heart, than to delight the ear and the fancy: and they learn to value the words of their teachers, by the elegance of their phraseology, and the luxuriance of their imagery, more than by their tendency to edification, or consonance with the Gospel of Christ.

To the inferior orders, and along with them may be classed the necessitous in every condition of life, this multiplicity of pleasures, whether of a criminal, or, in themselves, an indifferent kind, is manifestly pregnant with peculiar danger, in proportion to the scantiness of their means of indulgence. Whatever evils the opulent incur, by gratifying the solicitations

of appetite or caprice, they at least purchase their luxuries with their own lawful inheritance or honest earnings, and are not compelled to add fraud to their excesses. With the indigent, the case is widely different. If at any time, discontented with the homely accommodations of their lot, or tempted by the allurements which present themselves on all hands, THEY seek to deviate from strict frugality, they find, that, without recourse to some dishonourable practice, their artificial wants are not to be satisfied. Hence all the arts of unprincipled invention, so prevalent amongst the necessitous in a large place of resort; meanness and flattery, cunning and deceit, double-dealing and unfair advantage, pilfering and pillage. Hence the petty dealer poises the unequal balance, and the false witness is found, who will obstruct the course of justice. Hence also the vote is too frequently given away at popular elections, from views of interest, and not on principles of integrity. To the same origin, fruitful of almost every evil, may be ascribed the whole of that multitude of impostures, which, practised by the fraudulent on the wealthy, render them callous, because distrustful, when real claims on their benevolence present themselves: impostures, which when viewed as thus sealing up the sacred fountains of charity, may with reason be numbered among the most nefarious

offences. All these arts of diversified injustice, too familiar to the lower and indigent orders, result from a consciousness of their inability to obtain, by fair means, the pleasures which crowd around their senses; and hence, as we have just observed, the spot on which such pleasures most abound, must be to them fraught with more imminent perils, than to those whose coffers are commensurate with their desires.

III. A metropolis may lastly afford an interesting subject of religious consideration, as *it is extended in size*. In more confined provincial societies, every man becomes an object of attention to all around him: each character is under the tutelage of a strict and unsparing public. Neither any individual, nor his business, nor his behaviour, can be long shrowded in obscurity: and evil deeds, the most secret and artful, are dragged into light by a watchfulness of observation, and judged at a tribunal of severity. But throughout a large mass of building and population, it is manifest, that this system of narrow vigilance and relentless censure (which though frequently complained of, and not without its evils, unquestionably operates as no inconsiderable restraint on immorality) cannot be extended. By reason of the immense bulk of a metropolis, the private transactions of any one part of it are nearly

unknown in another. The inhabitants too, occupied about their own affairs, are not greatly interested in inquiring into the concerns, or disposed to notice the behaviour of neighbours, with whom they have few dealings, and little private intercourse. A great city is thus a hiding-place for wickedness: how powerful a temptation to the commission of it! What temptation more seductive, than probable security from detection?

But this, unfortunately, is not the worst. When individuals, as in villages and smaller towns, find themselves observed by day and by night, in solitude and in society, in the house and in the way, the imposition of fictitious sanctity or virtue is soon perceived to be a hopeless experiment. But here, where the common habits of life, the man and his communication *, are withdrawn, where all persons are objects of notice and importance, only during the few hours of their appearance on the stage,—in the transaction of their public dealings, and are not pursued behind the scene; is it not much to be apprehended, that some of the evil-disposed will make an unworthy effort, to present to the eye of man a simulated piety,—an unsubstantial image of Christian holiness,—professions which promise a virtue that does not exist, with the

* 2 Kings, ix. 11.

view of thickening around them the atmosphere of concealment,—of removing suspicion to a greater distance from their misdoings,—and at once of grasping the gain or estimation of godliness, and of hoarding the wages of iniquity?

In adverting to this last danger, I am far from wishing to insinuate, that the number of insincere professors, in any large society, is considerable; or to bring professions of religion or of integrity into contempt. This would be equally uncharitable and unjust; it would tend to sow suspicion betwixt man and his brother: it were to afford the shameless a triumph over the decorous; the lukewarm over the zealous, the profane over the devout. I am persuaded, there are multitudes, amongst Christians of every denomination, whose external sanctity is an unavoidable result, and a natural indication, of the warm sensibility of their religious affections; who FEEL what they manifest, and ARE what they avow. More firmly am I persuaded, that without the cultivation of that habitual, deep-felt seriousness of heart, which displays itself, more or less, in outward holiness and protestation, the evils of a great city cannot be effectually remedied: and consequently, that of a grave and pious deportment (the external sign of seriousness), when considered with reference to piety and to the moral virtues, it may here, as in all places, be said with propriety:

“ These, *these practical virtues* ye ought to observe; while, if ye would strictly observe them, ye ought not to leave the other duties, the duties of external sanctity,” neglected*.

I have only, now, stated, that this sober exterior may, in certain situations, be abused; while I have endeavoured to show, that it is no where more in danger of being abused, than in a vast seat of residence where it is practicable, with considerable security, to live hailed by the tongue and homage of applause in one district, and to be secretly reprehensible in another.

To dangers thus great, then, inseparable from a metropolis, to these temptations of its own, superadded to its participation with other places, in common spiritual perils, I trust, my brethren, we are all agreed in perceiving the necessity of opposing a strict and powerful counteraction. In narrower circles of residence, the mind, surrounded by unvarying scenes, and by objects that are few and familiar, is impelled by a kind of necessity to turn its thoughts inwards. Even when not virtuous from a principle of self-denial, it is to a certain degree innocent, through the absence of strong or numerous temptations. And however little it may be influenced by the fear of God, it is re-

* Luke, xi. 42.

stricted within some bounds of decency and propriety by a dread of human censure. No doubt, when to circumstances thus favourably arranged, Christianity joins her influence, a still more faithful, a far more comprehensive discharge of duties will necessarily be the result. If therefore, even in a retired condition, wherein good conduct is in some measure the growth of the soil, Christian principles be thus important and valuable, they must be eminently essential, and indeed indispensable, in a large society, where none, or few of the natural causes propitious to upright and correct behaviour operate, and where all things are, unhappily, so disposed, as to encourage and forward the developement of native depravity.

From the variety of principles, presented by Christianity, as adapted to meet the dangers which have here been described, the following may, by way of conclusion, be selected, viz.

I. A sense of human weakness, and of dependance on divine help :

II. A sense of the divine omnipresence : and

III. A sense of the honour and advantage of overcoming great difficulties.

I. Environed by so many perils as we have now enumerated, the inhabitants of a great city, above all other persons, are taught to make

an humble confession of their own weakness, and to subscribe, with the full conviction of feeling, to the doctrine of *divine grace*. THEY can require no reasoning to persuade them, for the truth must have been written on their minds by experience, that the amplest knowledge of duty, and the most earnest determinations to pursue it, will be utterly inadequate to preserve their feet from falling, unless they be supported by a strength superior to their own. Having, therefore, unusual occasion for this aid, let them, with especial assiduity, solicit it in the offices of devotion.

This deep conviction of personal weakness, when rightly settled in the mind, will further induce them to betake themselves to active employment, to shun, as much as their occasions permit, the distractions of tumultuous variety; to be "keepers at home;" to cultivate a taste for retired and domestic, for sober and simple pleasures; and at all times, if practicable, to engage their minds in some progressive task, or study, or labour, which may at once occupy leisure, fix attention, and cherish solid and serious habits;—not that these resources are, by any means, of themselves, a sufficient safeguard against temptation,—not merely as they are pronounced by prudence to be excellent auxiliaries of devotion (although thus to regard

them would be neither unlawful nor inexpedient), but principally, because they constitute, in the Christian's language, channels, in which the grace of Heaven delights to flow.

II. To a consciousness of dependance on divine aid, let *a sense of the divine inspection* be added. Learn to regard the Deity as the great and ever-present witness of actions, of words, and of thoughts: for whose constant observation no extent of habitations, and no mass of inhabitants, is too great;—who from his throne on high looks down, at a single glance, on all that is passing in every part of the great scene, in which individuals seem, to the irreligious mind, to be lost;—who is not to be evaded by escaping the search of man;—who follows the child when removed from the eye of his parent, the servant and the apprentice from that of their master;—the father, the husband, the master, the citizen, from that of their households and neighbourhoods;—the public character from that of the public.

Consider the Almighty Governor, moreover, as the witness of good as well as of evil;—who marks with satisfaction, marks with approbation, every instance of strict, though secret integrity;—every well-principled, though unno-

ticed self-restraint;—every benevolent deed, or prayer, or wish, which no human eye observes, and no trumpet proclaims. View in this engaging and endearing aspect, that “Father, who seeth in secret, and will reward thee openly *.”

III. Finally, be animated to a conscientious fulfilment of duty, by a sense of the *honour and advantage of overcoming great difficulties*. You ascribe to God the attribute of justice; and it is not, I trust, presumptuous to believe or to affirm, that although the most upright deserve nothing, and attain everlasting life, not by their own doings, but only through the merits of the great Redeemer of mankind; a Governor, whose ways are equal, will, agreeably to his justice, in apportioning retribution to individuals, weigh all the circumstances which shall have rendered them, during life, more or less pleasing in his sight: the degrees of holiness to which they shall have attained, the difficulties with which they were respectively surrounded. Is it at all inconsistent with Christian humility, to think that an apostle or a martyr will stand nearer to the throne of God, than the hermit of the desert? not merely on account of the greater utility of his life, but as he fought his way to his eternal home through

* Matt. vi. 18.

more powerful and painful obstacles? Thus, while they, who, in sequestered retreats, found few enticements to lure them from the right path, or who, living beneath a strict control or a severe scrutiny, were in a considerable degree prevented from wandering,—while these shall not lose their reward;—a happier remuneration may be humbly expected by those, who, obedient to the impulse of the divine Spirit, while they had stronger inducements to swerve from duty, continued steadfast in it;—who, while they had little detection of men to fear, feared God;—who were collected amidst distraction,—serious in the seats of revelry,—sober in the centre of intemperate pleasure;—who acquitted themselves honourably at the perilous posts, and who fought the good fight in the front of the hottest battle.

With such principles it is most highly expedient that they whose business mingles them among the crowds of a metropolis, should carefully familiarize their minds. A short recollection of them may, without inconvenience, enter into at least those few moments, sacred to meditation and devotion, which are supposed to occupy a portion of the morning and evening of every Christian disciple. Parents, impress them on your offspring; instructors of youth,

on your pupils; masters, on all to whom your influence extends. To the rising generation they are eminently important; insomuch that, if they be neglected, it may be pronounced scarcely possible, that any felicity of natural disposition,—that any parental care, indulgence, entreaty, severity, confinement, should be effectual to preserve the youth of a great city from falling headlong into vicious courses.

Forget the instilment of these salutary lessons, and you overlook the most important branch of education. What is it to make provision that the manners of our youth shall be polished, their sentiments refined, their talents brilliant; to enable them to push their fortunes in the world, or to rise to eminence in their day; whilst, doomed to move amidst an host of evils, they are rashly sent forth as sheep amongst wolves, wholly unguarded, and unprepared for the encounter? It is to bestow on these unfortunate objects of instruction, a few shortlived and seductive advantages; but utterly and cruelly to neglect their main welfare, and to intercept the best prospects which their Creator has opened and designed for them.

My brethren, chiefly to ward off the evils, to impart the principles and the advantages on

which we have expatiated, a body of benevolent individuals, aided by a liberal public, have erected the institution, within the walls of which we have this morning offered up our common devotions to our common Maker. Behold (and truly gratifying is the spectacle) a numerous band of objects of your bounty, the greater part of whom have been snatched and sheltered from situations of exposure to the worst evils of a vicious Babylon; and who are all at this time undergoing an education, in which principles of religion and useful employment are united, in order to prepare them, under the guidance of Providence, for withstanding their spiritual adversaries, whether their future lot shall be more or less exposed. To counteract the many surrounding perils, it has been your good fortune to have been nurtured by piety; to have been early taught to remember your Creator; to have risen to manhood under the control of discipline, and in habits of diligence. THESE had no kind and religious parental care,—no art of industry placed in their hands,—no Christian knowledge infused into their minds, until the hour of their reception into this asylum. Let your own hearts speak the rest. Consider what they might have proved, but for the bounty of the charitable, and the solicitude of the zealous. Con-

sider and behold what they are; and bless, while you behold, the good work which makes them so;—industrious citizens; worshippers of God; beings useful in their generation upon earth, and full of the hopes of a blessed immortality.

S E R M O N XII.

ON RETIRING FROM BUSINESS.

2 SAMUEL, CHAP. XIX. VERSE 37, PART I.

Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried in the grave of my father and my mother.

W HATEVER gratification activity may impart, it is usually courted for the sake of ultimate repose. Could we look into the bosoms of those who are eagerly engaged in the marts of commerce, and on the steeps of enterprise, we should probably perceive them all to be influenced by a secret wish, to close their career in tranquillity and retirement. The soldier who goes forth at the call of patriotism or glory, to fight the battles of his country, looks forward to a season, when he shall beat his sword into a pruning-hook,—when, sitting down among the companions of his earlier days, he may count his scars, and display his laurels. The physician, the lawyer, the tradesman, and all, in short, whose sphere of action lies in the throng, however intent for the present on pursuing opulence or honours, expect that, in the

decline of life, they shall be enabled to escape, from the tumult of the crowd, and the contentions of rivalship, to that ease, from which they only abstain for a while, that they may enjoy it in the end with greater dignity and satisfaction. Thus universal is the desire expressed by Barzillai:—prevailing even in the hearts of the most adventurous and unsettled:—of the merchant and mariner, whose fondest wishes, whithersoever they go, are pointed towards their home. Ever faithful as their own magnet to the pole, they look to that repose of which they were originally impatient, and which in the morning of life they deemed an inglorious slumber,—as the end of their toils, and the recompense of their dangers.

It is true, that there are some, who, though continually looking forward to, never actually arrive at, this issue of their occupations;—always abjuring, yet never forsaking the world;—panting for the shade, but unable to quit the glare of day;—or still having in fancy one more object to attain, before they shall bid a final adieu to their labours. The bulk of mankind, however, are, happily, not the slaves of this deplorable procrastination. Having, under the divine favour, gathered together an independence, and passed in safety through the dangers of middle life, they at length fulfil their design of relin-

quishing the scene of activity, and of terminating their course in privacy and peace.

Yet, alas! amongst the multitudes who have been thus fortunate, how small is the number who have converted to a wise use, that precious repose from agitation which they have obtained! By *how* very few has it been contemplated in forecast,—by how few employed, when possessed, otherwise than as an opportunity of enjoying the inferior delights of bodily and mental relaxation;—of going back again to their own city,—slumbering out a few years in unprofitable indolence,—of dying in the arms of their kindred, and being deposited in the tomb of their ancestors!

If such among you, my brethren, as these remarks more immediately concern, will favour me for a short space of time with your attention, I shall endeavour to show, more particularly, in what respects this condition of retirement from the stage of life is abused; and how it appears capable of being rightly improved.

I. Many, having been confined, during their youth and manhood, to occupations of laborious activity, seem resolved to indemnify themselves, in their declining years, by a total suspension of action, or what, it will be allowed,

is but little more valuable, by an absorption in insignificant employments. These seem to forget that vacuity and unprofitableness are criminal, throughout every stage of this existence, in a being, who was called into the world but to be serviceable, and whose trials cease not but in the tomb. In this point of view, there is hardly a shade of difference betwixt absolute stillness, and eagerness about matters of no moment,—the toys and trinkets of a second childishness: they may here therefore be properly classed together as kindred misapplications of an important and valuable opportunity, alike obnoxious to Heaven, because alike unserviceable to man. Unhappy, then, those, who seek to engage their minds,—when released from severer toil,—in gratifying the caprices of a trifling and fantastic taste! Let them not fondly presume, that in delivering themselves from the languor, they have escaped the criminality, of total inaction. Their mode of life is inefficiency in disguise. The winged insect that wearies itself in fluttering on the sunbeam, seems as little serviceable among the works of creation, as any animal which passes its winter in torpor, or as the sloth, whose motions are said to be imperceptible:—nor is it easy, in our present state, to discover much utility in either, unless God hath formed the one and the other, that man may consider both their

ways, and be wise. It may be added, that as the employments of busied triflers are usually attended with no inconsiderable expense, their manner of life is even more censurable than that of the wholly vacant idler, who is able to spare, and who frequently does spare, some portion of the earnings of his former toils, to satisfy the calls of indigence and distress.

II. Amongst the abuses of retirement, a nightly repetition of play, in its different gradations from time-killing to gaming, deserves a distinct place from inaction, or trifling employment, as standing a degree above both in criminality. I would observe, however, to avoid unreasonable harshness, that the remark here ventured is applicable to the habit, rather than to occasional acts:—for though, in truth, it were to be wished that Christian and rational society could be supported in entire independence of this resource, to borrow its aid may sometimes be nearly unavoidable, in compliance with the laws of civility, or in alleviation of the infirmities of age. Nor can it be denied that characters of great worth and seriousness have not seen, in a rare or moderate resort to the occupations here deprecated, aught that is incompatible with strict principle and cheerful piety. Yet even to these it never can be conceded, that no less exceptionable recreations could be devised,—or

that that which may be indifferent, in cautious moderation, in rare instances, or under peculiar circumstances, may not be highly culpable, when unceasingly and needlessly repeated:—especially if it be observed to call sordid or angry passions into exercise, or to make deep encroachments on invaluable time.

III. Slanderous, or at best unprofitable communication is much too frequently, I fear, resorted to, with the purpose of filling up that vacancy of soul, and those intervals of leisure, which are occasioned by relinquished business:—more especially, where the mind has not been furnished in early youth with a store of miscellaneous information; or in confined societies, where, in consequence of constant intercourse amongst the same parties,—the materials for general reflection and communication, possessed by each member, are soon exhausted, and known throughout his circle. It is a prominent advantage of active employment, that it engrosses so largely the time and attention, as happily to leave but little inclination or power for watching the trivial habits of a neighbour, or mingling in the unimportant politics of a village. The professional man, and the toiling son of trade, *study to be quiet, and to mind their own business**. But withdraw them

* 1 Thessal. iv. 11.

from the sphere of regular labour, and they are speedily assailed by temptations, till then unknown and precluded. An active mind, long used to occupation, will, for the most part, be occupied still;—but having abandoned its uniform and serious pursuits, it will naturally glide into others within its reach;—and hence, without any native meanness, perhaps without any plan of determined and deliberate malice, it will waste the remains of its energy in collecting the idle prattle, in propagating the floating rumours and defamatory chronicles, and in embroiling itself in the contentions, of the district to which it has retreated:—thus basely degrading the useful citizen,—the public benefactor;—him whose science repaired the faded constitution,—whose eloquence vindicated the rights of the injured, or whose hands respectably toiled for the well-being of the community,—into what the sacred volume has so forcibly condemned,—a tatterer, a busy-body, and a gadder from house to house*.

And the danger of sinking into these unworthy habits is the more to be apprehended, as they may be, and frequently are, conceived to carry along with them the imposing appearance of an austere virtue. An individual retiring from the public scene, forms vague resolutions of forsaking its vices and levities:—

* 1 Tim. v. 13.

and it is extremely natural that his renunciation of errors should be accompanied with strong dislike towards those who continue in them. This is accounted a necessary ingredient in his new virtue:—and it would not unnaturally seem to follow, that the slighter and more minute the errors condemned, the more rigid and exalted the holiness assumed. Such will, most probably, be found the process, by which an honest and legitimate indignation against bold impiety or scandalous vice, degenerates into a narrow and unworthy observation and exposure of those miniature defects,—those specks of peculiarity, which Christian charity and manly candour ought,—if not to pass altogether without regard,—at least to veil in concealment, or to mention with indulgence.

IV. In having expatiated thus largely on these prevailing abuses of a retreat from occupied life, I have confined myself, in point of space, to little more than the bare mention of the last and the most deplorable of them all—I mean **HABITS OF INTEMPERANCE.** Whether slowly contracted to chase away that gloom which results from the languor of inaction; or learned in unfortunate intercourse, as comrades in retirement, with the vacant, the sensual, and the sottish,—whose evil communication corrupts good man-

ners, and madly teaches the baneful and deceitful maxim,—Let us eat and drink, since tomorrow we die;—instances, I very deeply lament to state, cannot fail to crowd into the least censorious mind, of characters, who during all their happier days of employment, were patterns of strict sobriety; but who have sunk, in the shade of ease, into partial stupefaction; guarded enough perhaps to avoid ridiculous extravagancies, and not steeping their senses in total oblivion;—yet never sufficiently sober to think with clearness; to act with energy; to be found in a state of sensibility to religious impressions; or to take wise and secure precautions against the hour of their departure.

And now, having brought to a close this first part of my subject, I will shortly ask, my friends, and leave the answer to your own reason, whether any one of the employments now freely censured be a suitable occupation for a rational being, in the decline of life,—on the verge of eternity;—a being, ere long, to be removed from this abode of vanity, and to pass through the most awful changes and scenes.

Let us now, therefore, direct our attention to an inquiry, which to some, it is presumed, will be an object of no cold anxiety, namely,—

in what manner may retirement from the walks of tumultuous life, be the most profitably and rightly improved.

I. It is obvious, that, betwixt intense or compulsory labour, and a frivolous and ill-directed occupation, there is an intermediate class of employments, which combine utility with pleasure,—not being either so irksome or so uninteresting as to render exertion painful,—nor yet, on the other hand, so mean and trivial, as to stamp their votaries with the character of insignificance, or to leave a stain upon the wing of time. The man who, withdrawn from the turmoil of the crowd, contributes towards improving the pasturage or tillage of his country;—who devotes attention to the cultivation of its fruits, the nurture of its useful animals, or the embellishment of its surface;—who even assists the birth of the flower, and studies God in his works;—or who gathers health from the herbs of the forest, and spoils the fields of their fragrant medicines:—he who devotes a portion of his days of retreat and leisure to researches in sciences connected with the arts of life;—the experimenter in chemical processes, or mechanical inventions;—he whose former habits have been conversant in literature, and who seeks, ere he pass away,

to leave to late posterity the fruits of his studies and experience;—once more, he who, with unfeigned benevolence, performs the decent rites of hospitality and friendship,—all these may be averred (so far at least as such duties may in this place deserve consideration), to close their days consistently;—unbending without debasing minds released from professional or other severe labour, and enjoying the relaxation, without relinquishing the dignity, of rational and immortal beings. The expiring taper of life which they husband, is at once preserved by repose from wasting, and still trimmed as a light to give light to all that are in the house*. While the veteran of the world is thus not slothful, but “studious of laborious ease,” his time is deceived without being squandered; his mind is impelled, though with slackened pace, to its just end at all times, the service of mankind;—and in this view it seems not beneath the dignity, or wholly foreign to the object of sacred instruction, to recommend, or rather to sanction all such offices, provided they be practised from pure Christian motives of genuine love towards God and towards man, and ever be held secondary to higher obligations †.

* Luke, xi. 36.

† In this paragraph, the reader will observe, and I trust excuse, a few allusions to the works of some among our

II. Among these obligations, Charity, in a stricter sense, ought to occupy a considerable portion of the leisure afforded by retirement from active life. If the sick are to be visited, the ignorant to be instructed, the wants and woes of the timid to be searched out, and the real condition of more obtrusive supplicants to be ascertained,—if Fellow-christians, dwelling in a state of variance, are to be reconciled;—if a diligent hand be needed for the administration of that species of charity, which requires a sacrifice of time and trouble;—if public endowments be in danger of languishing through want of the inspection and superintendence of zealous patrons;—(and in every neighbourhood a considerable number of these manifestations of Christian kindness will be found to claim attention)—then such among you, my friends, as have disengaged yourselves from the cares of business, are the individuals to whom the community has a right to look up, for the discharge of such charitable offices. They are convenient to your condition;—they are suitable to your years. Your active neighbour, who has his private concerns to inspect, and a family yet to provide for by daily industry, cannot be expected, at this period of his life, to divide his

more popular poets, from which many expressions, on the present subject, could not fail to recut to the memory.

attention, in any considerable degree, betwixt the proper toils of his regular calling, and such pains-taking duties of charity, as have been recounted. The utmost that now can in fairness be demanded from *him*, is the reservation and allotment of a portion of his earnings for the supply of funds, which, in the subdivision of the labour of love, it properly falls to your share to husband and to manage. If it be *his* to bestow on the indigent, pecuniary relief, it is *yours* to preserve him from the imposition of spurious claimants, and to bring beneath his notice proper objects of bounty. If religion have a right to tax *his profits* for the support of public institutions, it is *your province* to see that his contributions towards that object be carefully economized, and rightly appropriated.

III. Another duty which it behoves you not to neglect, or to delay, is a prudent disposition of your worldly affairs, in the prospect of your speedy departure. *Set thy house in order, for thou shalt surely die**, is indeed an admonition suitable to every human being, even to the healthiest and the youngest in this uncertain state:—but its voice speaks imperiously to those withdrawn from active business, and fast declining into the vale of life. With reference

* 2 Kings, xx. 1.

to the mode of bequeathing your worldly possessions, the time commands me to rest satisfied with submitting to you these few plain directions, on which your own minds can enlarge. Let all lawful debts be, in the first place, discharged:—and next, attend to the duties imposed by relationship and gratitude. To these, private charities, and public munificence, will succeed in their due and natural order. In a word, let equity precede liberality: and beware of carrying down to the grave animosities and resentments, which you are conscious ought to have been buried with each descending sun.

IV. The last and most important concern, however, which belongs to you, my friends, whom I have now addressed, and whom I shall continue to address, with all freedom, is the preparation of the soul for its approaching departure. Of the imperious necessity of hastening this momentous duty, every peculiarity, every circumstance in your present situation, is calculated, most convincingly, to remind you. In having disencumbered yourselves from the cares of active exertion, the reflection must be obvious, that you ought to detach yourselves from the world;—that you have done, or ought to have done, with a minute or eager concern about all the vain affairs

of this transitory scene,—the contests of nations,—the intrigues of cabinets,—the politics of your district,—the divisions in neighbourhoods,—and in short, as a matter of keen worldly interest, with every thing that is doing under the sun. Other occupations, higher destinies,—events incalculably more awful and interesting, await you, and are even now at the very door. They who are setting forth on their earthly career,—they who are moving on in the zenith of their activity, and exulting in the glory of their strength, may have some slight excuse,—I cannot say for forgetfulness,—but for a faint or intermitted remembrance of that termination of their present existence, which may be conceived, in the probability of ordinary calculation, to be yet a great way off, and for which they may expect,—I stop not to say how foolishly,—to possess at a later season ample time for preparing themselves. But none of these pretences, none of these expectancies, belong at all, my brethren, to *your* case. Your noon is past; your day is far spent;—the lengthening out of the shadows of evening now reminds you, that you are come to the eleventh hour; and that if you have hitherto wasted life in negligence as to your grand interest, it is high time to awake out of sleep. It may be, that, in addition to your retreat from your calling, the frailty of your crumbling taber-

nacle may have begun to inform you, that the spirit will not continue much longer an inhabitant of it. Perhaps that living tenant may now see dimly through the darkening windows of its mansion;—perhaps the pillars of that mansion may be trembling beneath it. Or has the HEAVINESS of age come upon you with its infirmities, and have the days drawn nigh, in which you say, *I have no pleasure in them**? And shall not all these warnings conspire to remind you, that you have eaten and drunken enough, and that it is time for you to rise from the feast, and to go away?

You may moreover recollect, that in the days in which, it is to be feared, you were but too diligent servants of Mammon,—God was not, as he ought to have been, in all your thoughts. You did not perhaps make that just distribution of your time, which might have left you leisure for worshipping his name. You stole, for the sake of pleasure, some of the hours of occupation, and repaid them out of the hours sacred to religion. Lo! God has spared you:—afforded you repose, time, opportunity,—blessed opportunity, if you but so regarded it—for considering and repenting of your having thus dishonoured him. What ingratitude,—what infatuation, to toy with as a bauble, or to trample

* Eccles. xii. 1.

beneath your feet, this second, last, expiring occasion, of working out your everlasting welfare! Of such an indulgence, how many, who, like you, in early youth, or in full manhood, abused the former, have been deprived;—FOR it, how many would exchange the wealth of worlds! Yet now, to-day, it is in YOUR possession;—O! then, shall it not be prized,—will you not hasten without delay,—will you not strive, without intermission, to husband and to improve it?

As all the circumstances in your present situation unite to SUGGEST the duty of preparation for death and eternity, so is every thing around you FAVOURABLE to such preparation. You have less to obstruct your attention from the one thing needful, than you formerly had:—fewer anxieties, irritations, disquietudes, to ruffle your temper, and to try your principles. You enjoy more time,—more composure,—more seriousness,—more freedom from interruption,—than were afforded for the task in the past years of your existence. You have laid down your old age in the lap of ease. You have come to the Sabbath in the week of life. You have pushed your bark from the tempestuous ocean, into a smooth and tranquil haven. The storm of passion too has passed away;—you have already had ample experience in the toils of plea-

sure, of ambition, of worldly-mindedness;—and most probably have had full conviction of their vanity. You have withdrawn to a spot, where there are still some traces of Eden:—where resolution is less debilitated, and desire less inflamed, than in the scene of sin which you have abandoned. All being thus favourable to reflection and improvement, you will not surely LIVE ON to banish solemn thought,—or to sport and trifle down into the grave.

You have made, moreover, your acquisitions in terrestrial knowledge; the restless thirst of curiosity is allayed;—the drama is closed;—the curtain is dropt;—and nature now inclines you to deal more in retrospect than expectation;—in narrative than in new research;—in developing your collected stores of information, than in acquiring others. Religion then,—the branch of knowledge which you have too long neglected, yet which must be acquired, and which happily may be acquired with ease;—Religion,—which in your case must greatly consist in contemplation of the past,—is henceforward your proper employment and province, and claims an almost undivided attention. Now, where the heart is sincere, a review of the past can only result in self-reproach and abasement;—in a deep conviction of personal unworthiness:—and this is the first principle, the found-

ation of Christianity. For such conviction will urge you to take refuge at the foot of the cross, and to acquaint yourself with the stupendous mystery of human redemption. From hence you will be led forward, by an easy gradation, to commune with the Holy Spirit as the sanctifying power, which shall enable you to obtain an interest in the merits of the Saviour, and to walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory*. Like Simeon, you ought to live as it were continually in the temple;—to ponder on the divine law;—to pray without ceasing;—like that venerable old man, it will become you exclusively to centre all your views and hopes in the Messiah; and having found him, to resolve on resting satisfied with the discovery, and to say with gratitude, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* When you look around you, you will recognize a region and a generation from which you are speedily to be removed;—when you cast your eyes upwards, your soul will grow familiar with its destined mansions:—it will survey the country, and confess its home.

In these plain admonitions, let me not be conceived to insinuate, that all the pious duties incumbent on persons who have retreated from

* 1 Thessal. ii. 12.

an active sphere, are comprehended in offices of devotion. This is the unhappy error of anchorets and hermits;—of those useless tenants of monastic cells,—who have mistaken or perverted the purity of the Gospel. Such retreat, indeed, it is not to be questioned, is preferable by many degrees to a life of worldly-mindedness and profligacy;—yet it is not less inferior in value to one of useful exertion, and of exemplary virtue. To retreat, in any way, is better than to be subdued;—but to retire contending, and with the face turned towards the enemy, is, as well in spiritual as in worldly warfare, the only honourable retreat. The orb of light is not so fierce in his decline, as in the height of his meridian splendour:—he is less useful in ripening the fruits of the earth:—yet he ceases not gently to warm with his beams, and to gladden with his departing glory.

Yours then be the task to mingle offerings of holiness with the devotions of your evening piety. Have no false shame in recounting your omissions,—in imparting your regrets to the young by whom you are surrounded; that you may save them from your own hard-bought experiences, and erect a beacon amidst those rocks and shoals, through which you can no longer go forth as a pilot. Deprived of the power of guiding by active example, you still

can exhort, admonish, and warn;—yet you will do so, I trust, ever holding it in remembrance, that as all these in themselves are ungracious duties, delicacy, in discharging them, is needful to secure their effect. The preceptor of wisdom must wait for suitable seasons, and approach his pupils with indulgence towards their years:—he will not obtrude his lessons on the hour of innocent hilarity, or inculcate them with distressing peevishness and teasing reiteration. Let him silently exhibit to them the piety, the reflection, the sober-mindedness, which he would recommend to their adoption,—in the blessed effects of rendering him cheerful, serene, resigned, and moderately active, amidst the pains and infirmities of declining years. This is the true secret of obtaining that respect, that love unfeigned, that attentive service, which gay and heedless youth are naturally unwilling to pay to morose, and fretful, and self-willed old age. Thus will you be honoured, my aged brother, in the wider circle of that society in which you live; and find, throughout your vicinity, and wherever you are known, that the hoary head, found in the way of righteousness, resembles a fruit-tree in autumn; which, while laden with mature fruits for the profit of the gatherer, is yet capable of delighting the eye, by retaining all the softened beauty of its early foliage.—

While tranquillity and resignation smooth the declivity of your journey, faith will brighten your prospects as your bodily vision fails; and heaven dawn upon you as you advance towards its confines. Having turned back again from the world, you will die with becoming dignity, among your own people,—in your own city,—in the bosom of your own progeny;—and if buried in the grave of your father and mother, will enter their sepulchres without dishonouring their memories. You will fall like a shock of corn when it is ripe. You will descend to the grave like a venerable patriarch, full of years, of piety, of wisdom, and of honour;—blessing, and blessed. And when the archangel of God shall wake you from your mansion of dust, you will rise to the bloom of renovated and immortal youth;—you will enjoy *a perpetual retreat* from care and sorrow,—a retreat for ever undisturbed, for ever happy. You will receive a crown far brighter in glory than you had experienced even that of the silver lock;—a crown, the reward of fidelity unto death;—a crown of life that fadeth not away.

S E R M O N XIII.

ON THE CONDUCT PROPER UNDER FANCIED
OR REAL WRONGS.

ROMANS, CHAP. XII. PART OF VERSE 19.

*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather
give place unto wrath.*

PRIOR to the appearance of our blessed Saviour upon earth, the great duty of forgiveness was little understood. The Mosaic law, addressed to a people naturally stubborn and vindictive, was, to a certain extent, accommodated to their disposition. Besides, as it was intended, that the Jews should, for a season, continue a distinct race, and the depositaries of the true religion undebased by the idolatry of surrounding nations, the commandment which prescribed a love of enemies is supposed to have been withheld from the temporary code addressed to them, lest compliance with it should destroy that insulation of manners, which they were appointed to preserve until the fulness of time should arrive. That the law, in this view, might be made effective, it was rendered easily practicable:—a more exalted morality, tending to unite mankind, and to blend or soften their

differences, was reserved for a happier æra,—and the Almighty Legislator was, in the mean time, satisfied, with assigning regulations and limits to resentment.

The Gentiles, with the exception of a few refined understandings, classed the desire and principle of retorting a wrong, amongst the spirited and more sublime qualities of the mind :—while they considered meek and patient endurance as a mark of cowardice, and baseness of character. Thou shalt love thy friend, and hate thine enemy, was alike in the conviction of Jew and Heathen,—a maxim of justice, and the perfection of morals.

It was the celebrated sermon delivered on the Mount, which first animadverted publicly on this imperfect virtue, and fully rectified the sentiments of mankind, as to their conduct under injurious treatment. *Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy;—but I say unto you, love your enemies: bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you;—and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.*

To a consideration of this branch of refined morality, however, it is proper still to advance

with cautious steps, and with prudent limitations. If the phrases, enjoining us, when smitten on the one cheek, to turn the other also*,—that is, deliberately to lay open our breasts to fresh wounds;—or commanding an unqualified pardon of aggressions, seventy times seven repeated †,—were to be received in a sense strictly literal, it is plain that injustice would reign uncontrolled, that acts of cruelty would be accumulated without end, and that the disciples of Christ would be of all men the most miserable ‡.

The injured Christian is allowed, in most cases, to seek redress at the tribunals of his country, provided he be not of a litigious spirit in trifling matters, or actuated on any occasion by personal rancour. And the magistrate, as he is placed to be a terror to evil-doers, may avenge, by forms of law, a private wrong. Again, it is possible to be angry and sin not§. There are circumstances, under which resentment is lawful, or rather under which it becomes a positive duty. A dishonourable proposal,—an attempt to shake principle, or to corrupt virtue, may be spurned with the liveliest indignation. Here an unruffled indifference, a tame love of the aggressor, would betray the

* Luke, vi. 29.

† Matt. xviii. 22.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 19.

§ Ephes. iv. 26.

absence of moral sensibility. A transient feeling of resentment may further be excusable, as a sudden trespass of infirmity; although it deserves not that name if it be more than momentary. The sun must not go down upon our wrath*.

Neither are we expected to treat an enemy with the same cordial affection, or unreserved confidence, which we naturally manifest in intercourse with a friend. Our behaviour may be marked by an abstinence from familiarity, proper to convey to him our sense of his enmity; and by so much of cautious distance as shall be necessary to guard us from its future attacks.

Nevertheless, while our difference is pending, or in the height of our studied reserve, it is our duty, as it is practicable, to forgive and to love our enemy;—to rejoice in his prosperity;—to compassionate his misfortunes;—to render him any service of assistance or humanity which he may require;—to pray for his welfare; and in fine, to be freely and fully reconciled to him, on his acknowledging and desisting from his offences.

Fixing this general notion of forgiveness in our minds, let us now proceed to examine how we

* Ephes. iv. 26.

may, most effectually, bring our tempers to such a frame; and what reasons, whether worldly or spiritual, advise the suppression of those malevolent affections, which prompt us to inflict pain, or to invoke vengeance, on our brethren.

I. It is an important question, preliminary to this inquiry, whether the object of revenge be really an enemy. Admitting for a moment the propriety of resentment, have we paused to ask, is it in the present instance well founded? Have we received an actual injury? Perhaps a short reflection will be sufficient to satisfy us, that such a construction has been groundlessly imposed, by our pride, suspicion, caprice, irritability, or misapprehension, upon some action wholly indifferent. Wrong, in a word, may have existed no where, but in our own erring fancy, or diseased acuteness of feeling.

II. But if the conduct of our neighbour have given us substantial hurt, another necessary question will next arise:—Was the injury which he inflicted intentional? Nothing may have been further from his mind, than the idea of giving offence, in that unguarded, though, to us, painful expression, in that heedless omission of propriety or civility, which, listening to the voice of our wounded feelings, we may be too hastily apt to attribute to design. Nay, it is not impossible, that we regard, as a deliberate

affront, that which was intended as an act of the warmest kindness. How often are the affectionate warnings of a wise counsellor construed by a headstrong youth into an assumption of superiority? We scorn, as intrusion, the anxious zeal of friendship;—we blame, as arrogance, the homage of humble attachment;—and thus, a behaviour, which has alarmed pride, and kindled unreasonable resentment, ought, if rightly estimated, to have awakened our liveliest gratitude.

III. Suppose now, that there exist both injury and malevolence;—it yet remains for our attentive recollection, whether we were not, ourselves, the first aggressors? Did not our adversary inflict the wound in self-defence?—in resistance of our improper deportment? As to HIS criminality in retorting the first-dealt wrong, that is quite a different question, and no business at all of ours. If he *has* done so, the injuries are now balanced. A new one on our part will not even be retaliation. It will be fresh injustice.

IV. But indeed, in point of prudence, whether we ourselves were the original aggressors or not, a retorted offence is new matter of provocation, and almost infallibly ensures a reiterated blow from the quarter whence the

former proceeded. It may be that the wrath of the foe has spent itself in the first assault. He may have been satisfied:—he may have forgotten you. What folly then, to say no worse of it, will it now be, on your part, my Christian brother, to rekindle that flame which had died away of itself; to place once more in the hand of your adversary, that naked sword which he had returned into its scabbard! Or even if his wrath still continue unabated, a soft answer, saith the Wise Man, turneth away wrath*; and the most effectual method of appeasing an enemy, is the manifestation of patience and forbearance. On the other hand, the too natural consequence of acts of resentment, is to incite an endless reciprocation of enmity; since each proud spirit will not fail to harbour the conviction, that the scale of injury still preponderates on its side. Thus revenge is hardly more sinful than it is impolitic;—and to forgive would be the persuasion of selfishness,—though it were not the law of charity.

I cannot deny, that, in the variety of human dispositions, no small number of overbearing minds are to be found, who regard meekness, and receive submission, only as invitations to aggravated severity. Towards these, such an outward behaviour may be pronounced allowable, as is necessary to personal security;—yet

* Prov. xv. 1.

we must be very careful, that it on no occasion be accompanied by any vindictive act, or inspired by any sentiment of animosity.

V. In the next place, it deserves continual remembrance, that revenge is not, by any means, OUR province. *Vengeance is MINE; I will repay**, saith the Lord. Nor shall we search in vain for very strong reasons, to vindicate the Father of the Universe in this assumption of retributive justice into his own hands. He alone is qualified to apportion the measure of retribution;—because he alone has a full and exact view of the injury. To him alone are known the motives which produced it:—the degree of malice which impelled our enemy's mind;—by him are equitably weighed all the extenuating, as well as all the aggravating circumstances of the case. WE know nothing, but that we have sustained a wrong;—that we smart under it;—that our painful feeling and our self-love strongly dispose us to magnify it above its due proportion;—to hate the hand which dealt it, beyond measure, and to throw it back without moderation. Add to this, that there is something exceedingly preposterous and presumptuous in one sinful being's becoming the judge and executioner of another. To his own master he standeth or falleth †. Our business upon earth is to think and to study

* Rom. xii. 19.

† Rom. xiv. 4.

how we may best obtain forgiveness for OURSELVES; NOT HOW we may punish our BROTHER.

These truths, I am persuaded, if duly revolved, would induce us to render unto God the things that are God's;—wholly to resign to him the privilege of vengeance;—and to desist from all proud and unbecoming attempts, of wresting from his right hand the thunderbolts of his wrath,

Observe; there is nothing here to contradict what has been already hinted, as to the competency of civil tribunals to punish wrongs. These can be actuated by no personal resentment; and that is the emotion which it is our present business to decry. We are in truth incompetent to decide impartially in our own cause;—and the appointed arbiter stands in the place of God, to punish as nearly according to the precise aggression, as cool judgment and great wisdom can measure; and to award to the injured, reasonable redress, though not vindictive retribution.

VI. If, however, it should be pretended, that thus wholly to transfer the exercise of recompense to the Almighty, or to his established vicegerent, is an effort of principle too difficult to be at all times expected from frail humanity,

various and weighty considerations yet remain for overcoming an inclination to revenge. Among candid minds it will be admitted as an axiom, that hardly the most violent would deem resentment equitable, if the aggression, after inflicting a momentary pain, shall, in the course of events, or by a combination of circumstances, have in any degree conduced to the advantage of the sufferer. Much less then, necessarily, will it seem deserving of approbation, when the wrong complained of hath led on to our highest possible,—I mean our spiritual good. That animadversion of calumny, which, reaching our ears, has humbled us in the opinion we had falsely conceived of ourselves, and reduced our mental stature from the measurement of pride, down to its just dimensions;—that bold rebuke, which hath spoken to us an useful, although it may be an unpleasant truth;—any substantial injustice inflicted on our fortune, our character, our families, or our peace,—which has furnished us with experience of the deceitfulness of the world, and introduced us to an acquaintance with true religion;—ought surely to soften,—ought even to dispel our ill-will towards the individual who hath been the unconscious bestower of these spiritual benefits. The good obtained will be weighed against the evil intended: and we will look with indulgence, and even with thankful-

ness, on that enemy, who, in his wrath, hath blindly discharged an office of friendship.

VII. This view of the subject suggests another of similar nature:—I mean, the propriety of regarding the wound we have sustained, as having proceeded originally from God;—and him whom we call our enemy, as no more than the weapon of divine justice which chastises, or of divine goodness, which seeks our amendment. The injury, viewed in this light, is invested with an air of sacredness, and anger appears to border on rebellion and impiety. When Faith, looking beyond this visible world, has discovered in the heavens the unseen Author of the blow, resentment against the ostensible instrument of his power, sinks into submission to the mighty arm which guided it; and we learn to kiss the rod with which that arm hath smitten us.

VIII. Reflection on the present condition of our enemy will further be highly useful, in appeasing a vindictive disposition. Without any retributive severity on our part, he may already be sufficiently punished. Malignity is unhappiness. A spirit pining with envy, or rankling with hatred, is its own tormentor. Perhaps his mind is at this moment lacerated by remorse, in remembrance of his unjust con-

duct; a prey to deep disquietude in the consciousness of his living with us in a state of unchristian estrangement: although Pride may wrap up those regrets, and that uneasiness, within the folds of his own gloomy and sullen breast.

IX. Or should our adversary be a stranger to these delicate sensations, it will be yet well to remember, that the more destitute he is of virtue, so much the more is he an object of divine displeasure. If he has done wrong,—wrong unrepented and unrepaired,—alas! it is registered among his other faults in heaven. And we cannot tell, but what he is already, in some affliction, suffering the beginning of his punishment; though the connexion betwixt the hurt he has inflicted, and the chastisement he endures, may not be clearly evident, or may not be that of an effect springing from its immediate cause. What shall we think then? Is not this evil sufficient? Shall we seek to overwhelm misery,—to super-saturate resentment, by adding the venom and lash of our malevolence, to the sting of conscience, or the blow of Heaven?

And even if all things in the present world go on smoothly with him, ought we not next to reflect, that this enjoyment is probably but

temporary? It may only be a gleam of sunshine, preparatory to a terrible storm: The woe that has not befallen him, may impend over his head. In this case, how worse than cruel will it be, on our part, to anticipate eternal justice;—to urge reluctant vengeance;—to envy him a few fleeting moments of felicity;—and to come to trouble him before his time*!

I trust, it is hardly necessary to hint that this consideration is by no means proposed as supplying food for revenge. I would indulge the confident hope, that the man lives not on earth, who has drunk so deep into the spirit of malignity, as to desire that such a fearful extremity of retribution should befall his very bitterest enemy. Reflection, however, on the bare possibility of its befalling him, ought surely to extinguish every latent spark of enmity. It should touch our breasts with the liveliest compassion;—dispose us to deprecate his punishment;—not to contribute to it;—and render him, unhappy being! the object, not of our wrath, but of our pity and our prayers.

X. Yet if, in open defiance of all these cogent arguments, we WILL surrender ourselves to the inward fiend, and proceed to retaliate; we must not forget, when contemplating the present, or the probable recompense of our adversary's in-

* Matt. viii. 29

justice, that by this measure we render ourselves liable to all the same evils. *We* contract the internal disquietude and self-torment belonging to a malignant temper:—WE involve ourselves in the hazard of receiving present correction from above:—WE become obnoxious to eternal wrath:—so that in retorting malice, we are only, like the infuriate tiger who gnaws his chain, aggravating our own torments. In the mean time, we afford our foe a fresh cause of exultation; and in seeking to punish the author of the wrong, we heap a two-fold punishment upon our own heads.

XI. This leads us on to that great, evangelical motive, which is more weighty and persuasive than all those that have preceded it; and which, if no one other argument for forgiveness existed, would be of itself decisive upon the subject: *If ye forgive not men THEIR trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you YOURS**. Who is he that shall look this plain proposition in the face, and continue for another moment to foster rancour against an enemy? Who is he, to state the question in a different form,—who is he who hath no trespasses to be forgiven? Our ever-blessed Saviour took upon him our nature, and poured out his blood, for the remission of sins. He

* Matt. vi. 15.

suffered, to propitiate the Father, and to open a way for the acceptance of services, which, without that preparation, would have found no access to the favour of Heaven. But if we, my brethren in transgression, forgive not; if we refuse to perform the most Saviour-like of these services, the world will still be to us immersed in its ancient Heathen darkness:—all the inestimable benefits of redemption will in our case be utterly lost; the boon of pardon will be forfeited; and Christ will have died in vain. *With the measure with which we mete, it shall be measured to us in return**. Than this there is no one canon of Scriptural morality, more explicit in its statement, or more unequivocal in its meaning. Satisfied then as to the truth of it, by what strange infatuation, by what delusion, can we presume to hope, or to conceive, that *any* prayer will find acceptance, which seeks reconciliation with God, before the suppliant shall have reconciled himself to man? No;—the unhallowed orison will return upon his own head, to accuse, to condemn, and to cover him with confusion. That beautiful petition, “Forgive us our debts, even as we forgive our debtors,” becomes an ironical reflection cast by him on his own conduct. It is a deliberate supplication of divine wrath;—and the Hearer of prayer will literally GRANT his, in ap-

* Mark, iv. 24.

pointing him his portion with hypocrites ;—for that will be forgiving him as he has forgiven.

On the other hand, with how sweet a confidence, with how well-grounded an assurance, can he prefer this prayer, if he be conscious that he has fulfilled the previous condition, on which, under the Mediator, its favourable reception is suspended ! If, after he hath first gone and been reconciled to his brother, he then come and offer his gift*,—the gift of a truly penitent heart with respect to his other offences,—he may then dismiss all anxiety from his mind, and rely on his pardon, through the intercession of Christ, as firmly as if a messenger of peace from the eternal throne had acquainted him that he had seen it sealed.

XII. For practising the sacred,—we may say emphatically, the CHRISTIAN duty, which the various reasons now collected recommend, a concluding motive presses itself upon our regard, in the examples held forth by Scripture. Among these the leading one is that of God himself;—and it is brought forward by our Lord, indeed, when enjoining the love of enemies :—*Love them, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ;—for HE maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth*

* Matt. v. 23, 24.

*rain on the just and the unjust**. Even under the Jewish dispensation, although we have already seen that forgiveness as a legal duty was not fully specified until later times,—instances of this virtue, as prompted by the native impulse of a pious or tender disposition, are not wanting. Joseph wept on the necks, and amply provided for the wants, of those unkind brethren, who had sold him into bondage. David forgave Saul, for that inveterate and unprovoked hatred, which had instigated so many attempts upon his life: and the same heart yearned towards the rebellious Absalom, when he rose up in arms to shake the throne of his father.

But lest such instances of injuries overlooked, should be ascribed to the principles of loyalty, or of affection for kindred, behold the patient Father of Christianity, and the pattern of Christians:—who suffered as never man suffered; and forgave as never man forgave:—who exhibited in his conduct the duty which his precepts inculcated, and resigned his breath amidst the taunts and cruelties of his persecutors,—praying for their pardon, and apologizing for their crime.

Doubtless so high an example ought to animate and persuade us, not only to forgive our

* Matt. v. 45.

enemies, but to forgive them from the bottom of the heart;—not merely to abstain from returning the evil they have dealt, but to overcome their evil with good. *Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink* *. For in so doing, it is added, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head:—that is to say (widely different from the interpretation annexed to the passage by some self-deceivers, who have enshrined their rancour in the religion which disclaims it, forgiving on the fiend-like principle of resentment), thou shalt melt down thine enemy's heart into tenderness, as the silver is refined by the furnace. This return for injustice may overwhelm him with shame, and convert his rage into kindness. But however that may be, we shall assuredly, by such behaviour, have acquitted ourselves as disciples and imitators of our Lord and Master. We shall evince our having cultivated that heavenly disposition, which renders us meet to receive the adoption of sons;—brethren of the glorified Son of the Most High; and joint heirs with him in the everlasting love of the Father. Through HIS merits we shall be enabled to lay claim to the inheritance, which mercy hath purchased, and forgiveness hath bestowed.

* Rom. xii. 20.

S E R M O N XIV.

ON HONOURING AND VISITING THE GRAVES
OF OUR FRIENDS.

ST. LUKE, CHAP. XXIV. LATTER PART OF VERSE 5.

Why seek ye the living among the dead?

To whatever part of the world we direct our eyes,—whether we view men in a civilized or savage state,—whether we regard their feelings quickened by the influence of a vertical sun, or chilled by the frosts and tempests of the north,—we find them, alike in ancient and in modern times, anxious to collect the bones of their friends, to deposit them in a safe retreat, to shelter them from insult, and protect them from dispersion.

By some nations the relics of the deceased, thus hallowed, have been interred, or hidden in the cave of a rock:—by others embalmed, and preserved from decay:—by others, their ashes have been collected from the funeral pile, and enclosed in an urn, sacred to remembrance. Thus a reverence for the insensible earthly tabernacle is universal, however various the modes

of evincing it. So far may it be traced, that history presents the proudest and most valiant nations of antiquity, submitting to own themselves vanquished after a doubtful field, only for the sake of burying their dead. Many dangers were encountered, and large ransoms paid, for the recovery of a hero slain in battle. And the shades of those who had received no funeral rites, were fabled by the poets to wander many years, before they could be admitted into the seats of the happy.

When we turn to the sacred writings, we find them affording, in various instances, a sanction to this decent usage. *The valley of dead bones shall be holy to the Lord;—it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down, any more, for ever**. Not to dwell on inferior examples,—we read, that the body of our blessed Master was carried from the cross, and laid by his disciple of Arimathea, in his own new sepulchre, hewn out of a rock. Even angel messengers are sent forth to the spot, consecrated by his temporary insensibility; and are found sitting, one at the head, and another at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

In this sacred veneration for the bodies of the deceased, our own customs are not observed to

* Jer. xxxi. 40.

vary materially from those of other times and countries. We carefully restore ashes to ashes, and dust to the dust from whence it came. Our cemeteries are revered nearly as our churches. We consecrate the ground where the dead are laid;—and shelter their remains from rude hands, and profane uses. We raise the stone to mark out where they are laid: and an inscription records the last sad event of their history.

Connected with this disposition to pay decent honours unto the earthly remains of the departed, is another hardly less generally prevalent;—that, I mean, which so often prompts survivors to visit the silent spot where they are laid. *And it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite, in the place where she had been offered,—four days in the year**. The Apostles, Peter and John, are represented, in the New Testament, as anxiously watching around the holy sepulchre. How careful are the two Marys to come, early in the morning, to the tomb of their beloved Master! And when one of them is thus addressed by an angel, *Woman, why weepest thou?—how strongly does her reply betray the feelings of the heart!—Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him †*.

* Judges, xi. 40.

† John, xx. 13.

Customs, thus general as the voice of nature, appear to be dictated, not by strict reason, but by one of those fond illusions of the imagination, which men have at all times loved to indulge. Reason would tell us, that there is nothing in the grave which is capable of being either satisfied with our respect, or offended by our omission of it:—that underneath us earth is mouldering with its earth;—and that, if the principle by which it was animated be still the seat of consciousness, it is fixed in a higher abode. It seems, then, that, obedient to the suggestions of fancy, we conceive that the soul, which formerly inhabited the body, may still perhaps hover near its tabernacle;—to mark the decent rites presented by surviving friends;—to hear their voice; to witness their sorrow; and to answer to their call. Hence an anxiety to spare that spirit the sensation of beholding its earthly frame cast forth by the hand of indifference, to be the prey of animals, or a spectacle of offence. Hence the pensive luxury of lingering in the place of graves:—of frequenting the hallowed spot where our associates are at rest from their labours. We regard the tomb as the porch of Heaven, where the living may go to hold converse with the dead. We there seem to stand on the confines of eternity, and to listen to the secrets of the unknown world. From the

distractions of care, and the insipidities of pleasure, it is not unnatural to retire to this gloomy satisfaction. "Sacred," we say, "be these last depositaries of our best and dearest treasures:—smooth and untouched be the turf which covers,—unstirred the earth which mingles with their ashes;—that disconsolate friendship may readily find the scene most favourable to the indulgence of its tender and better feelings; and know where to meet with the sainted objects and witnesses of its occupation, when it goes forth to ponder, to remember, and to weep."

This imaginary reanimation of the ashes of the dead seems, in like manner, to occasion and to account for the desire of the living to be gathered, whenever their own final hour shall have arrived, to their family burying-place, to the long home of their fathers. *Bury me*, says the Patriarch Jacob to his children, *bury me in the cave of Machpelah:—there they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife;—there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife;—and there I buried Leah**. *Entreat me not to leave thee*, said Ruth to her mother-in-law,—and who does not perceive the delicacy of the request?—*for where thou goest I will go; and where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried*†.

* Gen. xlix. 31.

† Ruth, i. 27.

But whether the custom of honouring, and the pensive pleasure derived from visiting, the still remains of the dead, may be traced to the delusion to which we have here ascribed them, or simply to our love of consecrating and frequenting scenes, which easily recall, by association, many tender remembrances to the mind, it is pleasing to learn, from Scriptural examples, thus satisfactorily confirming the voice of nature, that the voice of nature, in the present instance, is not to be stifled or opposed.

Satisfied then, that there is, at least, no impropriety, in reverencing and cherishing the memory of our lost friends, let us proceed to inquire in what respects these solemn exercises may be rendered advantageous,—in addition to their being pleasurable.

I. It is obvious, that the first lesson taught us at the graves of our companions, is the brevity and precariousness of the present shadowy existence, and the awful termination of it, to which we are all fast hastening. Were they, to whose tombs you carry the tribute of remembrance, arrested in the beginning of their earthly career, or in the health and strength of manhood?—and will you not learn to distrust the delusive promises held out by the bloom of youth, and the vigour of maturity?—Did the

objects of your sorrow drop in full old age, like a shock of corn when it is ripe?—and can you fail to reflect that the most protracted life is but a span;—and that all the sublunary pleasures which sparkle in your eyes, and excite your ardent wishes, must be relinquished in fourscore years;—a brief period, a vapour, and a vanity at the best;—yet part of it with all of us,—GREAT part of it with many, already elapsed,—and the scanty remainder rapidly rolling away.

By this wise consideration of our latter end, the necessity of preparation for it will naturally be suggested. Hark, sons of mortality, to the warning voice, which, issuing forth from the recesses of the tomb, while it reminds you that you have here no continuing city, persuasively adds, *Be ye therefore ready* *. These narrow cells, to which you love to resort, will speedily become the receptacles of your own bodies, as well as of those you have recently committed to them. Your spirits, like the spirits of the deceased, will go to live for ever;—but whether in happiness or in perpetual pain,—whether in the society of the pure or of the wicked, is in great measure, and is now, at your own disposal. A learned and devout Prelate of our church, while in a beau-

* Heb. xiii. 14. and Luke, xii. 40.

tiful epitaph inscribed to the memory of his daughter, he consoles his mind with hopes of immortal bliss, introduces this caution, which every one ought well to remember,—“provided only that I be found worthy.” It is needful that we should walk according to the law of the Gospel, if we desire to enjoy its promises. And strong is that motive to faith and to holiness, which, while we are giving way to the more amiable feelings of nature, in lamenting those friends of whom we have been bereaved, reminds us, that to the region where they now are fixed, the unbelieving and disobedient never can approach.

II. In honouring the remains, then, of such objects of esteem, let us assist our preparation for that eternity to which we are destined to follow, by recounting their good qualities, and comparing their dispositions with our own. Has the youth attained any portion of that steady virtue, that respectable sedateness, or that meek piety, which encircled as with rays of glory the head of his venerated and sainted parent? Does the husband study to imitate those gentler graces, which qualified the mother of his infants for the society of angels? Does the widow strive to copy that strict principle, that correct propriety, that sober prudence, or

any other rigid and dignified virtue, of which sorrow may have fixed a well-known portrait in her soul? Unless accompanied by such comparisons and applications, unavailing to ourselves as to the friends whom we deplore, are the bitterest tears which water the borders of the grave. But,

III. While we resolve to imitate, by the grace of God, whatever is pure, and honest, and of good report in the characters of departed friends, let memory be no less faithful and minute, in her private register of their faults. The best have not lived WITHOUT their faults: and however fitting it may be that decency or charity should veil, or extenuate the offences of the dead, when their characters are canvassed in society, it is equally expedient, that, in our secret contemplations, we should bring them back to view precisely as they were. We are but too prone to overlook in our companions, when they are no more, those failings which we had been accustomed to palliate during their lives. Our remembrances are only eulogies;—and too frequently agreeable delusions;—while fond affection shrinks from the representations of truth, as if they were indelicacy or injury to the departed. But however cold and invidious may prove the employment of drawing back from their dark abode the frailties of those we

love, the Christian instructor is strongly called upon to enforce it, lest extravagant attachment should begin by consecrating, and unhappily end in imitating misdoings, which reason and religion pronounce deserving of being shunned.

Recollecting, that if our deceased brethren could return to the precincts of day, there are defects which they would doubtless alter in their conduct, let us avail ourselves of the opportunities of which they are deprived. Considering that their failings have, in every probability, shorn away a beam from the brightness of their glory, and abated that eternal happiness, which, through the extension of mercy, they enjoy—(alas! what if some of them, presuming too far on that mercy, be altogether self-excluded from part or lot in the inheritance of saints?)—let us improve the precious moments which Providence hath yet assigned to us, that we may withdraw our eternal station as little as may be, from the throne of God, the fountain of felicity,—and treasure what we can of that rich reward, which is promised to our faith, and measured by our exertions.

To accomplish this end, it will, in all cases, be beneficial, to withdraw attention from the worthiest of fallen and imperfect men, to the great and excellent Standard of Christian holi-

ness, the Author and Finisher of our faith;— who alone is incapable of misleading as a pattern, because in him alone “was there found no blame.”

IV. By these reflections I am led to notice particularly, what I have above slightly adverted to, the great doctrine of a general resurrection of the dead, as another topic worthy of employing the thoughts of mourners, while they are bending over the sepulchres of their friends. A subject this, on which natural religion had formed to itself a few faint and plausible surmises and conjectures:—but as these were rather the desires of affection, the dreams and fictions of sorrow, than infallible conclusions or authorized assurances, they would be often stript of all their power to administer consolation, by the simple view of a cemetery. There affection, with a sad and pensive remembrance, would clasp the marble, or gaze upon the monument, as all that remained of its pleasures. While it wandered forth amidst the dreary receptacles of the departed, and beheld their bodies resolved into their original elements, or the ghastly and fleshless scull cast up by the spade,—a chilling terror would be struck into the heart, by that awful scene of stillness, desolation, and ruin. All subtle reasonings, and all fond wishes, as to the probability of

resuscitated animation, would fall before the disheartening but natural question,—Can breath return to bodies thus demolished and dissolved? Can these dry bones, these crumbling ashes live*? *Shall the dead, O God! arise and praise thee? Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the grave, and thy faithfulness in destruction†?* From this condition of tormenting apprehension, and gloomy despondence, the world has been fully delivered by the light of revelation. For sure as Christ himself hath arisen from the dead,—sure as competent witnesses who relate that wonderful event, have laid down their lives in attestation of their veracity,—so sure is it that *God, who hath raised up Christ, will raise up us also by the word of his power‡*;—so sure, that *all who are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and come forth§*.

V. But, admitting that they whom we have lost shall arise, a doubt may still suggest itself, whether they may be restored to us. And of the kind intentions of Providence in this respect, it will not, I presume, be difficult to present proofs (as an additional theme of meditation), satisfactory to sober judgment, and powerfully consolatory to sorrow. The general consent of nations in the opinion referred to;—those

* Ezek. xxxvii. 3.

† Psalm viii. 10, 11.

‡ 1 Cor. vi. 14.

§ John, v. 28.

anxious expectations of reunion so dear to the human breast, expectations which the Deity cannot well be supposed to have implanted, without intending to crown them with their object;—the very nature of virtuous intercourse, which is pure and celestial;—our certainty of the future existence of the different ingredients—(of our own immortal spirits, and of those of our friends)—necessary to constitute this species of enjoyment; and the difficulty of assigning a reason why God should separate them in ignorance, or exclude them from a participation, of the happiness enjoyed by each other;—these considerations, when all gathered together, seem arguments of no trifling weight, in favour of the doctrine we are endeavouring to establish. Considerable stress might further be laid on the manifest earnestness with which the sacred penmen have laboured to prove the resurrection of the BODY: especially in that celebrated portion of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, which has been inserted in our Burial Service:—since it is difficult to ascertain wherefore such pains should be employed, to assure the disciples of Christ that they shall be clothed with glorified BODIES, unless that solace might arise amidst the separations of the present scene, from the belief that Providence, in securing a future personal individuality, must have designed a renewal of mutual knowledge,

and of personal friendship, for individuals whom it had dissevered upon earth.

But besides these intimations derived from reason, and from the general scope and tenour of the inspired volume, particular passages can in no scanty number be collected, speaking, more expressly, to the same effect. If Christ told his Apostles that they should be with him where he was ascending*, can we rightly suppose them to be there deprived of the power of knowing their former Master, and one another? If we are surrounded by a cloud of spirits of just men made perfect†, must not these just men dwell in one holy fraternity? Is not Lazarus described as reclining on the bosom of Abraham‡? Did not the King of Israel pacify himself under the loss of his child, in the remarkable words,—I shall go to HIM, though he cannot return to me||? Does not St. Paul acquaint the Thessalonian believers, that they should rest together with him, when the Lord should be again revealed with all his holy angels¶? From these and similar passages, may it not be confidently concluded, that all those ties of virtuous friendship and concord, which had been, on earth, cut violently asunder

* John, xiv. 3.

† Heb. xii. 23.

‡ Luke, xvi. 23.

|| 2 Sam. xii. 23.

¶ 2 Thess. i. 7.

by the hand of death, will be again knit together indissolubly in futurity?—and may we not reasonably pronounce, that in the summary and rule of our faith, prescribed in the Apostles' creed, the communion of saints has been annexed to the resurrection of the dead, and to everlasting life, with propriety, as to its kindred doctrines?

VI. Finally then, let us learn, amongst the abodes of the departed, the reasonable and proper use of this world. A view of these silent and dreary mansions, indeed, naturally tends to withdraw the soul from an immoderate attachment to sublunary objects. When *they* for whose sakes life was chiefly desirable, are taken away, and our eyes have ceased to behold them, some of those silver cords are loosened, which bind us to this place of our enchantment. The world now dwindles in its apparent magnitude, and attracts less of our notice and affections. In a land of strangers, and bereft of its props and reliances, the soul prepares to plume its wing, that it may fly away and be at rest*. Our conversation is happily elevated by our wishes, to the vast field in which it ought to expatiate, and we pant with greater earnestness after our proper home, as we perceive more and more of our treasures removed to it. Our inducements

* Psalm lv. 6.

to climb the ladder, which in the vision of faith appears let down from Heaven, are multiplied, as glorified beings with whose looks we are familiar, ascend and descend in greater numbers. These,—brethren in hope,—are salutary impulses, when obeyed with prudence and moderation. But beware of abandoning the indispensable duties of life, when weaning the heart from excessive fondness for its vanities. Thus acting, bow in silence before that Supreme Disposer, in whose hands are the issues of life as well as of death*; who in the dispensation which you deplore, hath only resumed what he lent; and who is able with a word,—and who designs,—to restore it yet again.

To conclude—From this prudent and principled economy of sorrow,—from so chastened an indulgence of the better affections of the soul,—you may reasonably hope to return from each visit to the place of graves, more devout and more virtuous, as well as more composed. But if there be any who repair thither only in order to bewail, what they impiously deem an irreparable loss; to look wildly on the wreck of enjoyments, which, with unbelieving hearts, they tell themselves are for ever past; to weep over the departed as if they were vainly conceived to be the ETERNAL tenants of their dark

* Psalm lxxviii. 20.

abodes;—then, to such sorrowers as men without hope*, it becomes proper to address the rebuke of the heavenly messenger—*Why seek ye the living among the dead?* If there be any who waste the precious season of probation by too protracted,—or criminally shorten it by too impassioned recollections; who devote to idle musings, and romantic sensibilities, and imaginary conversations at the tomb, a disproportionate share of that attention which is due to their families, and to friends who yet remain:—any, who industriously tear open the wound, which God and time would heal, neither chiding the feet that love to linger near the haunts of sorrow, nor the soliloquy that fondly hangs on the minutest remembrances of the past;—by these, in a different, though not less emphatical meaning, is the same admonition deserving of being recollected: “Away, and do good to those who need your succour: away to the living;—your business is not to trifle among the dead.”

Had I the power to reveal the invisible world; could I here draw aside the veil which hides the things eternal from our senses; and show to one, an infant, to another, a parent, to another, a friend;—they would doubtless appear saying, with countenances beaming benignity,

* 1 Thessal. iv. 13.

but with the gentle chiding of immortals,—Some indulgence of regret is natural, it is becoming;—some short suspension of worldly occupations is pardonable. It will profit you in your preparation for a more exalted state. Come, on each returning first day of the week, with your sweet spices of remembrance; and bedew our ashes with your tearful offerings of affection. Come, and answer to the air as it sighs over the grass, which covers our lowly dwelling:—and listen once more in imagination to the voices, which but yesterday you knew so well. But see that these effusions and fond indulgences of sorrow be tempered by reason and religion. Awhile are we permitted to watch around your path, that we may impart to you a salutary warning, and intimate the intelligence of truth. Be not deceived; we are risen. The stone is rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre*. Behold the spot where we lay. The SOUL is not the tenant of the dismal vault, or covered by the hillock of earth. There our ashes are alone now left; and while dust has been mingled with its native dust, the light-winged spirit has returned unto its original home. While you vainly wander in this place of tombs, and love to mourn over our insensible remains,—that part of us which knows, and remembers, and feels,

* Matt. xxviii. 2.

is settled in its sphere, and finds its eternal occupation, in extolling the praises, and enjoying the presence of God. Beyond the reach of pain, beyond the flight of imagination, we are entered into peace;—we are taken from the evil to come. Our difficulties, our struggles, are for ever over. Ours is now the palm of triumph, and the garment of purity. Weep not then for us: but weep for yourselves*;—and weep not for your loss, but for your unworthiness to follow. Hence, and surrender the soul to God. Depart;—and whatsoever the hand findeth to do, let it be accomplished ere the hastening shade of evening descend †. Thus, whether your bodies shall be deposited in the grave with ours; whether they may be appointed to perish in the waters, or to be scattered in their dust to every corner of the globe; your SOULS will be gathered unto your relatives and friends:—THEY shall enter into our glory;—they shall partake of our rest: and in a spiritual communication, more intimate, and more pure, than can be conceived by flesh and blood, *Where WE are, there ye shall be also ‡.*

* Luke, xxiii. 28.

† Eccles. ix. 10.

‡ John, xiv. 3.

S E R M O N X V .

ON READING.

ACTS, CHAP. XIX. VERSE 19.

Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them, and found them fifty thousand pieces of silver.

IN the infancy of society knowledge was communicated, chiefly, through the medium of oral instruction. When the aged Patriarch* delivered to his children, or to a popular assembly, the results of his long experience, he was regarded and listened to with almost superstitious veneration, because wisdom could be gathered no where but from his lips. This mode of teaching, however, was speedily discovered to be subject to several very material disadvantages. The information which it imparted was, primarily, confined to a narrow circle of auditors; and even by these it was liable to be

* Job, xxix. 8.

NOTE—Want of room prevents the author from fulfilling his original intention of subjoining a list of books proper for a general library, to this discourse.

misunderstood, to be imperfectly learned, to be quickly forgotten. It could not easily be arrested as it was uttered, with a view to the patient investigation of its accuracy:—nor could it embrace many topics of calculation or of research, which although highly useful, would not, in delivery, be comprehended, or relished, by the generality of hearers. To remedy these defects, the important art of writing, either by means of symbols or of letters, was invented. When wise men died, they left their wisdom in books, as a rich legacy to posterity;—and numerous are the volumes of that wisdom which antiquity has transmitted. If so early as the days of Solomon it could be said with truth, that of writing of books there was no end *, the assertion, or rather the complaint, may, with infinitely greater justice, be made in these latter times of the world, when such repositories of knowledge have continued to accumulate as centuries have rolled on, and when the art of multiplying and cheapening copies by means of printing, has placed them in almost every hand.

An acquaintance with literature now demands no trifling allotment of time and attention from the higher and middle ranks of society; nor even among the labouring classes is it altogether

* Eccles xii. 12.

unknown. Books are not merely luxuries, but necessities of life. Some species or other of these vehicles of intelligence, forms a *daily bread* to most educated minds.

Now, since in that prodigious and endless multiplicity of books, with which every part of the civilized world abounds, some are good, and others indifferent;—some edifying, and some pernicious;—a judicious selection of such as seem deserving of our own perusal, and of being placed in the hands of those to whom we wish well, must doubtless be of essential moment to morality and happiness. To parents and guardians of youth, I am well persuaded, few considerations can be more pregnant with anxiety:—but to hearers in general, the subject, I think, must be interesting. Life being short and extremely precarious, while business and other avocations occupy no inconsiderable portion of that limited and uncertain space, it must surely be useful to learn how the leisure left for reading admits of being the most profitably employed. And our dispositions and characters being ever deeply tinged by the nature of the ideas which we usually imbibe, all who place a value on their immortal spirits must be concerned in discovering what ideas, coming through the medium of study, it is desirable to receive, and what deserve to be

avoided. For these reasons I have thought proper to turn my own meditations to a subject thus momentous, actuated by the humble hope of being not unserviceable in directing yours. Happy, shall I at this time prevail with any individual, to imitate the honourable converts mentioned in my text, who brought their pernicious books together, and burned them in the sight, or for the example, of all men.

On this, as on every other subject of education, or branch of duty, the remarks of a Christian teacher ought, unquestionably, all to proceed on the great Christian doctrine of the natural depravity of man. We are to take it for granted in the outset, that the evil inclinations in the human breast are naturally far stronger than the virtuous tendencies; that divine grace is needful as a corrective of this condition; and that it is our consequent duty to shun, on the one hand, whatever may obstruct, and on the other, to seek whatever is likely to favour, the descent of this blessed and necessary help.

I. These fixed principles, then, being held steadily in view, it is obvious to remark, that BOOKS OF PIETY ought to occupy some part of the time allotted by us for reading. Moral philosophers, after laying down the principle, that

idleness is the parent of transgression, and inferring from it that harmless or rational employment will prove alone a sufficient safeguard of virtue, have confined their admonitions respecting such a course of reading, as has for its object the cultivation of morality, to recommending the dedication of the hours of leisure to the perusal of compositions addressed to the intellect and the fancy: and, as *secondary* opponents to temptation, we deny not (we shall presently indeed have occasion to observe more fully), that such works are admissible, and highly profitable. But if they be held up as the *SOLE* resistance to that powerful enemy,—any who consider that employment itself has its dangers,—who remember that man, in his natural condition, is at once assailed by external circumstances, and by his own traitorous breast, cannot entertain a moment's doubt as to their weakness. No relish, indeed, however eager, for the pleasures of the mind; no engagement, however deep, in intellectual researches, can supply the absence of religious principle and occupation, as the great safeguard of morality. The first practical rule, then, which I would offer, with regard to reading, is, that each revolving day should commence and close with the perusal of a certain portion of the sacred writings. These, says the Apostle concerning the Berean disciples, were more noble than

those of Thessalonica—in that they searched the Scriptures *daily**. This practice faithfully observed, and settled into a habit, will keep alive the spirit of devotion in the mind, which is too apt to be secularized by ordinary studies; and impart a seriousness and solidity to those pleasurable feelings, which even the most harmless recreations, when not thus guarded, are apt to elevate into the effervescence of levity. An employment thus salutary, will moreover be found not altogether unproductive of delight. Be assured, you will find it pleasant, before going forth to your daily labour, to contrast the quiet, the repose, the benevolence of religion, with the noise, and jostlings, and selfishness of that crowd, among which you are about to mingle. So again in the evening, when you return weary with the business,—disquieted with beholding the sinfulness,—or ruffled by exposure to the crosses, the anxieties, and perplexities of life,—how soothing to tranquillize and to pillow the soul for a while, in appropriating the praises uttered by the holy Psalmist; in accompanying the beneficent pilgrimage of the blessed Saviour; in reviewing the consolatory promises of God, and throwing yourself forward into that blessed state, where all is purity and unsullied enjoyment! Here remorse finds a promise of forgiveness to the

* Acts, xvii. 11.

penitent, written in the blood of Christ: here affliction approaches a well of living waters, where, drinking, it will thirst no more. Youth prepares for itself a shield and a stay, against the vicissitudes, the difficulties, the dangers and snares unto which it is destined:—and age discovers a charter of its inheritance beyond the tomb;—a Pisgah, which it may ascend to behold its land of rest, and learn to depart in peace*.

* To the perusal of the Sacred Volume it is necessary to advance with awe—We should cast off the shoes of worldly affections, and divest our minds of inconsiderate heedlessness, remembering that we tread the precincts of holy ground. (Exod. iii. 5.) Let us beseech God to cast his sunshine upon the dial; to illuminate with his grace the volume of salvation; nor less to open the eyes of our understandings, that we may clearly see, and obey the wonderful things of his law. (Psalm cxix. 18.) Let us read more with an humble wish for edification in the faith, than with a view to gratify the vain curiosity of research, or to foster the proud spirit of disputatiousness; desiring the sincere milk of the word. (1 Pet. ii. 2.) By reading the sacred book of truth progressively, and in pursuance of a fixed and regular plan, we shall avoid the error of regarding the facts as unconnected with each other, or the precepts as a collection of loose detached aphorisms. Viewing it as a great whole, we shall contemplate each passage as being a stone in a mighty arch;—a branch in a large tree;—a limb in a body, to which there is a corresponding limb;—a piece which fits into a vast machine, and in the absence of which something essential would be wanting. In the account of the creation of man in happiness; of his temptation and expulsion from paradise; of the gradual unfolding of prophecies relating to the Messiah; of the Levitical

In addition to the Bible, there are other volumes of piety well meriting a considerable

institutions, types, and ordinances referring to the same august and blessed Personage—of his appearance, life, crucifixion, death, and resurrection—of the subsequent apostolic miracles wrought—effusions of divine grace bestowed—sufferings undergone—epistles penned—and a final prophetic revelation vouchsafed, we shall trace the origin, developement, and progress towards accomplishment of one magnificent, comprehensive, and wonderful plan for raising the human race from the ruins of a first fall; for preserving them from a second, and a more deplorable lapse; for rendering them wise, good, and eternally happy. Thus, the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase of itself unto the edifying that is in Christ. (Eph. iv. 16.)

Such awful information, we must needs acknowledge, deserves not to be glanced over in a cursory manner, or perused in a listless or wandering frame of mind. SEARCH the Scriptures, is the injunction of our Saviour (John, v. 39): and to search must mean more than to skim the surface, or to dip into the contents.—It is to read, to mark, to learn, and inwardly to digest. It is deeply to ponder, thoroughly to examine, and patiently to meditate. It is, above all, to make spiritual and particular application of the truths and precepts which we there find delivered, to the state of our own souls; to ask ourselves, whether we have been guilty of the vices reprobated, or have cultivated any of the virtues extolled; whether we have repented, and sought reconciliation in the manner which these sacred documents prescribe; whether, agreeably to their mandates, we rely on the divine succour, and perceive ourselves to be growing in holiness and true wisdom. It is to place the example of our Lord and Master before us; to cultivate and cherish that temper of love, that peace of mind, that harmony of the affections, the air of the

share of your attention:—such, for example, as are needful to elucidate its information, by commentary, interpretation, and paraphrase;—by methodizing its facts, and explaining its geography and antiquities;—such as represent to reason and conviction the evidences in favour of the truth of Christianity; as illustrate its doctrines, or record its history as a church;—not forgetting those which more immediately point to the grand object, for the sake of which the others are chiefly recommended,—a life of faith and repentance, of piety, and of active obedience. I shall only for the present add, under this head of discourse, that next to the word of God, such books appear especially to be the proper employment of the morning and evening hours of the Sabbath: of which solemn day, I hesitate not to pronounce, it is some profanation to dedicate ANY the slightest portion to ordinary intellectual culture; *more* particularly in the case of those to whom ample opportunities are afforded, for this latter species of application, during the week.

highest heavens, which the religion of Jesus breathes, and which it was his benevolent purpose to diffuse. It is, in one word, to consider the sacred writings as profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; and as given that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, and wise unto salvation. (2 Tim. iii. 16.)

II. These observations have superseded the necessity for my dwelling with minuteness on the next description of reading demanding notice;—I mean the consultation of books addressed to the understanding:—books of history and philosophy; of fact and argument. We are, certainly, not required to devote ALL our hours to religion, or to confine the range of our application, exclusively, to religious writings. The great scheme of education embraces a wide circle of science;—and to the moderate pursuit of all its various departments, the strictest Christian may without harm or blame addict himself. Such pursuits indeed may, with safety, be pronounced, not merely harmless, but eminently conducive to morality. By introducing a taste for intellectual pleasures, they much abate the force of sensual appetite. By providing for the mind a fund of solid employment, they prevent the encroachment of that variety of temptations, which are incidental and fatal to vacuity:—as the soil pre-occupied with healthy and useful plants is preserved secure from weeds. Intellectual pursuits may be further recommended as tending to instil a sobriety of thinking, highly favourable and closely allied to religious habits:—an examining forecast, a practice of connecting causes and effects, which is frequently found to resist the aggression of temptation, by applying its ge-

neral habits of reflection, and maxims of judgment, to a consideration of the remote evil consequences of indulgence. These studies form a domestic and contemplative disposition:—rendering the mind independent on the frivolous circles of gay society, or the more perilous haunts of public amusement, for its recreation from employment, or its relief from languor. They impart to their votaries both a fitness and a predilection for the society of the wise, the grave, and the respectable:—while any who are unacquainted with them are, for the most part, observed to betake themselves to a participation in the noisy revelry of licentious, or in the idle folly of frivolous associates. Among the praises of intellectual research it is not the least, that it supplies materials for innocent, if not profitable conversation: precluding the necessity of recurring for topics of discourse, to slander, frivolity, or indelicacy,—those constant and melancholy resources of the vacant mind. To persons also unfortunate in irritable dispositions, or endued with keen sensibility, it will serve as a wholesome counteraction of the natural temperament;—correcting violence by the frequent exercise of reasoning; and blunting too nice a susceptibility of feeling, by employments which tend to elevate the judgment above the imagination. Such studies are

surely much more suitable to beings endowed with reason, and distinguished from the inferior animals by peculiar privileges, than the low occupations, which, if these were absent, would supply their place in the attention and affections. They prevent all occasion for having recourse, through idleness,—they in a great measure wean the mind from a DESIRE to have recourse, to reading, of either a pernicious or a trifling description. To these remarks I cannot refrain from adding, that well-disposed minds must derive unfeigned satisfaction from observing, that the mental improvement of the gentler sex has engaged particular attention in modern systems of education; since all the advantages now recounted have a further tendency, in their case, to elevate the morality, and to enlarge the happiness of families, by drawing closer the tie which binds man to his partner, in assimilating their minds, and refining their endearments;—as well as by rendering the mother more useful and expert in conducting the education of her child.

On these accounts I deem it not improper for the Christian minister to recommend an attention to intellectual improvement;—to propose a well-chosen selection of books in History and Biography; in Moral Philosophy; and in Natural Science;—to introduce Knowledge and

Reason to the notice of his hearers, as handmaids of Piety, and as inferior means of grace.

All along, however, it is proper to keep in mind, that mental pursuits are still to be preceded and accompanied,—to be guided and hallowed by religious application. This is that grace before the course of intellectual food, which converts it to spiritual use and nourishment. For if intellectual studies be permitted by us to retain an uncorrected and undivided empire over the mind, it is not to be concealed that they will produce sufficient evil, nearly to counterbalance all their boasted advantages. From the secret sense of mental superiority which they confer, will be generated a proud and overbearing spirit;—a dangerous disposition, which, while it tramples upon men, is not far from haughtily exalting itself against God. Eager to monopolize the praise of his own acquirements, the irreligious scholar hastens to deny the particular providence, and to dispute the authority of the Great Bestower of his qualifications. One Christian doctrine is dismissed after another;—the divinity of the Saviour,—the power of his atonement,—the influences of the Spirit,—are all successively summoned before the tribunal of arrogant talent, and condemned. Such prejudices, gaining strength, will lead on, in course

of time, to other vain speculations on the accidental formation, and high unscriptural antiquity of the globe;—on the mechanism of the soul;—or on the supposed descent of the human race from various parent stocks;—concerning all which, humble, unsophisticated faith, and calm reason informed by revelation, and not warped by pride, would never have entertained a doubt. Ere long passion corrupts the intellectual guards, who are set to keep watch around the moral principle; and the proud son of science, destitute of internal purity, of honest conscience, and of any solid foundation of virtue, derives from his stores of knowledge and his improved mental ability, only the power of throwing a flimsy, but fallacious, colouring over the naked deformity of his licentiousness;—of wrapping up falsehood in ingenious sophistry;—of making a vicious appear an excusable or proper conduct;—of concealing from himself and from his brethren his real condition;—in short, of palliating depravity with plausible defences, and of decking it out in the fascinations of refinement.

It will be further advisable, in the acquisition of intellectual knowledge, to mingle in no small degree, meditation with reading. As the ordinary food of man is designed by the Creator to repair his exhausted strength, and to adapt

him for the resumption of his labour, he who pampers and gluts his intellectual appetite by devouring more than can well be arranged in his mind, or converted to the wise end of benefiting himself and others, may be regarded as the epicure or sluggard of the understanding. Lay aside your book, and commune with your own heart.—Understand I what I read*, and do I find it truly profitable?—Is the matter nearly, and in every distant bearing, reconcilable to the doctrines and precepts of Christianity?—How may its information be applied to the good of men?—Does it furnish any reflections morally useful to myself?—May it not assist in confirming my belief in immortality?—supply natural proofs of the existence and providence of God?—or, in its lowest value, discover the imperfections of natural knowledge? May I not learn from it, in contemplating the vast powers of man, to adore the great Being, who is the bestower of these powers, or perhaps to lament that they have not, in the instance before me, been better employed, for the welfare of his creatures and the promotion of his glory? Is there any thing in what I have been reading which perplexes, or endangers?—then, before I proceed further, let me seriously consider within myself; whether it will not be better to turn to some other

* Acts, viii. 30,

study;—or, at least, let me pray for mental illumination;—invoke moral principle to preside over my speculations;—and betake myself, with a teachable spirit for instruction, to the counsel of some prudent and upright friend. While I am here enjoying the selfish luxury of the understanding, have I been careful to allot a just and reasonable proportion of time to the discharge of my social and active charities? Never let me forget that my intellectual culture ought principally to retain this essential object in view:—and let me cheerfully quit the chamber of seclusion and study, whenever a benevolent service waits to be performed.

It will be further for my advantage to note the frequent distinction betwixt the professed object, and the general tendency of a book. It may profess to inculcate some useful principle, while it actually unhinges belief, or sets all the passions in a flame. That book is ever the best, which excites in the mind an appetite for benevolence;—a hunger, whose cravings are intolerable, until they be satisfied by the performance of some act of duty or of kindness.

In my admiration of the vast achievements, and the shining virtues recorded in the page of history, has the love of power,—has a passion

for vain-glory insensibly possessed my breast:— or have I overlooked, as inconsiderable objects to a great mind aspiring after noble things, and emulous of single acts of heroism, the unostentatious, unpraised, unnoticed virtues of the shade,—the principle of integrity inviolable in trifles, and those domestic duties, and that perennial suavity of disposition, which so often powerfully contribute towards the happiness of common life?

III. But is the whole of the time, you will ask, appropriated to reading, to be engrossed by these more serious studies; to be entirely divided betwixt religion and science? Shall the mind at no time be permitted to unbend itself among the lighter pleasures which solicit its notice? From the amendment of the heart, and the culture of the understanding, can no moments be spared or allowed for relaxation, in wandering among the bowers of fancy? By no means. The blooming garden of taste is open to the Christian, not less than the animating steep of science. From many of the preceding arguments, which appear to have fully warranted our permission and recommendation of scientific acquirements, we may likewise deduce the lawfulness, if not the expedience, of bestowing some share of attention

on elegant literature. This general permission must, nevertheless, be understood as granted under strict limitations. Light reading, it must never be forgotten by us, is not properly study, but recreation; and as such, must ever hold that subordinate place to the exercises of the heart and the understanding, which amusement, in general, bears to serious business. Again, the child of mortality must consider the value of time. Remembering the brevity and insecurity of his days, and the ample variety of more serious acquisitions, added to the extreme difficulty of attaining them,—he ought to bring himself to require as little relief in lighter pursuits, as is consistent with bodily health, and with mental vigour. But the chief reason which should content the disciple of Jesus with a cautious and abstemious use of works of fancy, is the tendency of too many of them to encourage instead of thwarting, to cherish instead of suppressing, our inborn and latent principle of evil. Many writers, of splendid genius, it is true, have consecrated their endowments to the service of God; have rendered the maxims of sacred truth, and the contemplations of pure devotion, more worthy of being styled the beauty of holiness. Like David, they have called their lyres and glory to awake in the praise of religion or virtue: and resolved that the statutes of the Bestower

of their gifts, should *be their songs in the house* of their pilgrimage*. Others there are, whose alluring productions, though less professedly calculated to promote the divine glory, deserve not to be totally condemned or overlooked. As affording a harmless employment and a pure delight;—as enriching the fancy, and improving the taste;—as thus enlarging the stock of innocent pleasures, and furnishing matter for conversation at once interesting and inoffensive;—as investing mental pursuits with their proper supremacy over the appetites of sense;—in fine, as useful, under divine aid, in softening that asperity, refining that coarseness, and melting that insensibility, by which many tempers are distinguished, they may, unless I judge rashly, be, with propriety, embraced in the scope of ministerial recommendations. But wherever passion is constitutionally violent, and the natural susceptibility of the feelings acute, I am regardless of obloquy, while I pronounce it as my candid opinion,—that almost all works of fancy whatever are pernicious, and ought to be carefully withheld from the eyes of youth. Does not prudence urge the necessity of counteracting that propensity, which already hovers upon the borders of moral disease? When you encourage and foster it, by indulging your child or pupil in an

* Psalm lvii. 8. and cxix. 54.

unchecked perusal of works of imagination, are you not, with mistaken kindness, adding a steepness to the slope, a spark to the tinder, and wings to the whirlwind? Than such behaviour in a parent or superintendent, with reference to a young mind, endued by nature with ardour or tenderness of disposition, what can be imagined more injudicious, more indiscreet, more cruel, or more criminal*?

Of works of fancy there is one denomination, which the very general passion for it observable in the present age compels me to single out for an amplified animadversion. You are already aware, I think I may conjecture, from the smile which plays upon the cheek of levity, that I allude to those fictitious representations of life and manners, with which many of those who hear me, I am sorry to express my fears, are but too deeply and too daily acquainted. That I may here avoid declamatory and unreasonable abuse, I shall guard my observations on the present head, in the outset, by making two admissions, which might, as I conceive, be deemed by all to be sufficiently liberal. First, to a small number of these tales of fancy (though such exceptions are exceedingly few), the strictures to be offered may not be applicable

* Sponte suâ properant, labor est inhibere volentes.

in their full extent:—some, I will not deny, may be perused without danger; some perhaps even with considerable improvement;—since they may fairly merit the character assigned them by an austere moralist, “of having taught the passions to move at the command of virtue.” Secondly, a very wide distinction is to be observed betwixt a rare recourse to such literary gratifications, in a season of recreation, of anxiety, of despondence, or of bodily pain;—and the abuse, the culpability, the VICE of devoting to them some of the best hours of almost every day, in this our short, sole, solemn time of probation.

Under these limitations I proceed to observe broadly, concerning fictitious and romantic narratives in general, that before an assemblage of Christian auditors, they cannot be mentioned without marked disapprobation. It will not be denied, that the study of them is a waste of time;—for what, I would ask, is their ordinary character? Is it not that of the most flimsy, frivolous, insignificant of performances? It is the natural tendency of novels,—(for why should I hazard being here misunderstood, by searching about for vain circumlocutions?)—to indispose the mind for solid and serious application, for historical narrative, or philosophical disquisition;—as the palate accustomed

to high-seasoned delicacies soon loses all relish for plain and wholesome food. The habit of devouring them is usually, indeed, progressive, beginning with the amusement of some vacant hour, and in the sequel engrossing the entire attention. It is no ordinary mind that can return with facility, from the brilliant images and the fairy land of fiction, to the sober lights, and the rough soil, and the didactic plainness of truth.

By volumes of romance, the imagination, that dangerous guide, is invested with a sovereignty over the sober judgment:—the feelings placed above the reason of man. To the one sex is imparted an adventurous unsettled disposition, unfavourable to the regular pursuit of an useful calling:—to the other an insatiable desire of attracting notice, a love of splendour and of stratagem, of brilliant accomplishment, and of public appearance, not less inimical to the meek and quiet ornament of solid qualities and domestic virtues.

While a false sensibility is thus infused into the young breast, the acquaintance with counterfeit distress, which is opened by this course of reading, will inevitably prove destructive of genuine and useful feeling:—for not only does danger arise from the habit of separating the

sensation of sympathy from that active relief which it was implanted in the breast to prompt, and from which it ought on no occasion to be dissociated;—but the real sorrows of life are usually found accompanied with circumstances of homeliness, sufficient to repel, in loathing and disgust, that fastidious taste, which has expatiated only amongst elegant and fancy-wrought afflictions.

Still more unfavourable must be the tales of wild adventure to right impressions of religion;—creating that sickly propensity for being amused with flowers, and dissolved in tears, and interested by suspense, which finds only insipidity in the once read narratives of Scripture, and turns away from the useful and awful doctrines of Christianity, as from learned subtleties and theological barbarisms, foreign to the refinement of a delicate and a polished mind. Many of these works make pretensions to a moral;—or, in different words, they convey some cold recondite maxim, which it is difficult to discover amidst a magazine of immorality, or, at best, a mass of unprofitableness. To administer an inflammatory potion with so weak a corrective, is to poison, for the sake of trying the experiment of an antidote;—or wantonly to set fire to a temple, in the hopes of extinguishing the flames with a cup of

water. In general, the real object is exclusively to please, no matter in what way that end shall be attained;—and as the gentle reader, be sure, is the most effectually pleased by being flattered in his errors, and soothed in his indulgences, they are, for the most part, little else than an artful tissue of apologies for error, and palliatives of indulgence. Here you will see justice halting after generosity,—mental sobriety and seriousness stigmatized as enthusiasm,—a regard for the Christian doctrines pronounced illiberal bigotry,—vice extenuated with the soft name of indiscretion,—artifice represented as the proof of superior understanding,—and, in fine, a spurious honour usurping the seat of faith, the only solid and stable principle of obedience.

To fictitious histories it may yet further be objected, that the much-boasted fidelity of their resemblance to real life is perhaps their greatest evil. By exhibiting to admiration those mixed characters, that compound of vice and virtue which we usually encounter in society, an imperfect standard of morality is established, which the unwary are but too prone to satisfy themselves with attaining, while they lose sight of the only safe and legitimate model, the blameless and faultless Son of the Most High.

This lukewarm contentedness with imperfect obedience, will take the firmer hold in the minds of inexperienced readers, if represented, and it is commonly represented, as the object of love, and praise, and remuneration in the present existence. Farewell then all remembrance of man's probationary condition;—farewell all trust in Providence under adversity;—farewell the conviction that the recompenses of Heaven are, through the Saviour's mediation, proposed only to the holiness that is still purifying, still dissatisfied with its attainments;—to the light which, though it may never shine forth as the perfect day, is continually making nearer approaches to it. And in thus anticipating the allotments of futurity, one powerful argument of natural religion in favour of an hereafter is defeated. Attachment is fixed on the present scene; and the motives are weakened for seeking with all the desires, affections, and energies of the soul, that state where alone true joys are to be found.

In general, even the least exceptionable among novels are far from being orthodox in the religious principles they inculcate. The reclaimed transgressor makes his peace with God, by the Deism of an imperfect repentance, and not by the Christianity of faith and

spiritual help,—of a death unto all sin, and a new birth unto all righteousness. In the mean time, nothing is more common with the more virtuous characters, than an irreverent use of the highest and noblest Name, on every trivial occasion of surprise or indignation, of joy or sorrow; or even of simple assertion or denial.

Our time, I perceive, however, is far spent:—and though I had much more to offer on this fruitful and momentous subject, I am compelled here to draw my observations to a close.

Since men transfer their minds to the pages which they write, the world, as long as it shall abound with vicious authors, will necessarily be filled with vicious publications. Hence a prudent and careful selection of those writers, with whose works you or yours are to cultivate a familiarity, becomes to you, my friends, a matter of the utmost moment: for by indiscriminately consulting all which are presented to your notice, you convert reading, which in general indicates, and, if well-regulated, would certainly establish, solidity of character and elevation above the baser appetites, into a dangerous engine for the murder of time, the destruction of principle, and the tainting of purity*.

* If the motive indeed for reading be a desire of solid improvement, a judicious selection of authors will be more

“Evil communication corrupts good manners,” is a maxim as applicable to books as to men: for what is the perusal of any volume, but acquaintance, intercourse, communication with the author? Hence, as the characters of men are inferred from those of their associates;—it will follow on the same principle, that the character of their library would furnish no less certain a key to their own. This would show accurately whether the disposition of the owner be pious, pure, grave, solid, active,—or sceptical, sensual, frivolous, vain, indolent. Would you deem it then a disgrace to be found in the confidence of a person notorious for depraved or contemptible moral character?—think it equally dishonourable to retain in your possession a book of which the principles are noxious. By one great and glorious victory over Satan,—by an effort truly worthy of a disciple of Jesus, let me entreat you to purify your repository of instruction: to gather, if I may so speak, the wheat into your garner, and to separate the chaff for the fire;—in plain language, to collect together all such productions as are in any way inimical to Christian faith, or to pure morals;—and although the computed price were fifty

effectually secured, than when the object proposed is to enable vanity to discuss, in the circles of gay society, the merits of every novelty of the day.

thousand pieces of silver, to burn them before all men.

This destruction you owe to yourself and to your brethren;—and not only to the present race, but to a generation yet unborn. For if, through your failure to deliver the world, as much as lies in your power, from so fruitful and poisonous a root of temptation, your child, your domestic, your neighbour, or any one of your posterity, shall, in time to come, be vitiated; at whom, I would ask, does the Gospel point its denunciations?—*Woe be to him who shall injure one of these little ones;—or to him by whom offences come;—verily I say unto you, it were far better for that man, that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea* *.

At that awful tribunal before which we must all appear, and to which we are all so rapidly hastening forward, the two great questions to be proposed to us, we may believe, are these:—First, “In what manner have you employed the time of probation?” and secondly, “How did you improve those means of grace, which Heaven vouchsafed to you during your earthly course?” Inconsiderate mortal! how acute will be thy compunction; how deep thy

* Matt. xviii. 6, 7.

dismay, how dreadful, and, alas! how well-grounded thy apprehensions, if to the former of these interrogatories thou shalt only be able to answer,—“That precious time which conscience and Scripture commanded me to devote to the diligent discharge of domestic duties, and to the solid improvement of my mind and heart, I have wasted;—foolishly, profusely wasted, in dreaming over idle and unprofitable pages:”—and to the latter of them,—“All the proffered dispensations of grace, I have lived but to reject and to oppose:—THEIR errand was to purify the soul;—MY studies and amusements have tended to corrupt it;—I have been long loosening the faith which *they* sought to confirm;—fostering that voluptuousness which they essayed to extinguish;—and instead of elevating my affections ABOVE the world, in a compliance with their benevolent suggestions, I have ever addicted my mind to a vain application, tending to no purpose but that of rivetting my attachment, to its pleasures, its pomps, its advantages, and its renown,”

S E R M O N X V I .

O N D E S P A I R .

 P S A L M C X L V I I . V E R S E 3 .

He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

I N addressing the COMMON children of adversity, topics of consolation can be derived with effect, from that constant vicissitude which is observable in human affairs. We may call on them to put their trust in a powerful and beneficent Providence, able and well inclined to disperse those heavy clouds, which for the time lower upon their condition; and to overspread the sky with its wonted serenity. As we warn the proud man, who exults in his prosperity, not to BOAST himself of to-morrow, we may say, with equal propriety, to the victim of despondence, *Take courage, and hope for better on the morrow*;—assigning the same reason for the caution and the consolation;—*Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth**.

But there exists a far more unfortunate class of sufferers, to whom such considerations cannot

* Prov. xxvii. 1.

be applied: those, I mean, whose afflictions are distinguished from the usual woes of humanity in this;—that their lot is cast unalterably; their peace irrecoverably wrecked;—that they can look for no change in their melancholy condition, but in the silence and forgetfulness of the tomb:—who sit, as on a lonely rock, in the midst of gathering darkness and rising waters;—where no voice can be heard, and no object descried:—and who have only now to prepare for the last advancing wave, which shall sweep them away into oblivion.

This is despair;—the last extremity of sorrow;—a deplorable state, demanding of every by-stander the deepest commiseration and the tenderest assistance. Under *other* forms and circumstances of affliction, the sufferer will struggle and expect; and his efforts and prospects will, to no small extent, diminish the pressure of his burden, and preserve the spring and cheerfulness of his disposition. If fortune has been unfavourable, it may again prove kind to him;—when labouring under pain, he may look for relief and quiet;—when an obstacle interposes itself in any of his worldly pursuits, he may be stimulated to redoubled exertions in surmounting it. When surrounded by the hea-

viest and most complicated calamities, if of such a nature as to admit but the faintest hope of deliverance, the heart will be loath to sink. While the bare possibility of escape yet remains, the natural buoyancy of a sanguine mind will fondly conceive what is distantly possible to be that which is likely to occur. Such instances of distress are *the infirmities* incidental to humanity, which the spirit of a man can easily sustain*. But who can sustain, by the unaided force of reason, that affliction of the mind, that depth of tribulation, in which every ray of promise is gone, and the darkness is total:—in which a long and dismal winter hath set in, that brings no prospect of a spring;—and wherein the reed of hope, which could have born up its head against the ordinary fury of the elements, is itself bruised and broken?

Come, then, my brethren, let us employ the present moments in contemplating and compassionating that class of our fellow-beings, unto whom the description now delivered refers:—the most unhappy of an unhappy race. You will hereby exercise your better feelings;—you will learn resignation under your own less severe trials:—in considering a lot which you know not how soon you may endure, you may hope to derive benefit by learning its duties and

* Prov. xviii. 14.

consolations;—or should you fortunately continue, in your own person, exempt from it, you will at least experience advantage in learning what arguments are proper to be addressed by the voice of Christian friendship and sympathy, to any whom it may have already befallen.

Of these, some, I doubt not, are now assembled with us;—and to such our subject must, in no ordinary degree, be interesting. I may perhaps be to-day addressing myself to not a few, who have suffered in their minds wounds for which there is no conceivable cure, by the total frustration of their favourite scheme, by the complete disappointment of those prospects and wishes, in which they had centred the whole enjoyment of their lives. I imagine myself speaking in secret to the soul of some mourner, hopelessly bewailing the irreconcilable alienation of that familiar friend who had eaten of his bread, and drunk of his cup, and been unto him as a daughter. Hither may have repaired other children of sorrow, from whose countenances health has altogether departed; who have become weary of searching it from fountain to fountain, and of seeing the fair illusion flee from before them,—and who can mark that disease, which will in its time destroy, advancing by slow degrees, but with

a steady and a fearful progress. Here too, amongst our fellow-worshippers, may a different class be numbered, who having, in one unguarded moment, been betrayed into a deed of shame, find that not all the sincerest and bitterest contrition can avail to recall their forfeited good name, or to reinstate them in their place in society;—whose glory among men is departed,—and whose pride of reputation is humbled to rise no more. A separate band, it is probable, may be convened, whose relish is palled for the richest delights of life, since some with whom they once took pleasure in participating them, have vanished from the light of day, and have been brought to their long home;—who wander over the world as through a desolate wilderness, sad, lonely, and dissatisfied;—seeking not rest, because by them it cannot be found;—and mournfully conscious that no good can happen unto them, until they too shall have arrived at the dark and narrow dwelling, appointed as the termination of their labours. In vain to all these, the sun looks abroad in his beauty, and the fields are clothed in their pride. Sweet odours breathe no refreshment on their senses;—the voice of glad music will only increase their dejection;—and on witnessing a mirth which they shall never more experience, the oppression of their spirits unburdens itself in tears.

While others are happy, THEY are mourning for their joys; and refuse to be comforted, because they are not*. Passed away, as a dream, are the days of their cheerfulness:—vanished is that alacrity which sprang up amidst transitory evils, from the smiling promise of a better change. With the Patriarch they say, *Our purposes are broken off* †. Their pulses of activity have ceased to throb: for the fire has gone out;—the inward strength has failed:—“The wheel is broken at the cistern ‡.” Weeks, and months, and years flow on;—but no interval of gladness breaks in upon the gloom. “Day unto day uttereth speech §;”—but it is all the same long tale of sorrow. With them heaviness endureth for the night; but joy cometh not in the morning ||.

O! sons and daughters of remediless calamity, to you, who have, as it were, bidden adieu to the world, revealed religion spreads forth her arms. She beckons you from a scene, where the star of expectation hath set, where all is now over with you, and calls you to come unto her, that ye may recover your rest. She it is who hath power to heal the broken in heart;—whose hand can bind up those deep and painful wounds, into which the world has no balm to pour.

* Jer. xxxi. 15.

† Job, xv. 11.

‡ Eccles. xii. 6.

§ Psalm xix. 2.

|| Psalm xxx. 5.

What then, let us inquire, are the considerations which revelation presents, adapted to the condition of this class of sufferers? Here consolation must necessarily be preceded by advice; since it is only by attending to the admonitions to be presented, that the subsequent words of peace can be confidently relied on, as available to the imparting of substantial relief.

I. First, then, I would most earnestly entreat the unhappy individuals, whose sorrows I have undertaken to console, that, in this total extinction of their earthly happiness and hopes, they make not shipwreck of that more precious, — that inestimable treasure, — the *conscience void of offence* towards God and towards man*. Unable as are the sons of men to control the course of events, and to avoid the sorest calamities of this existence, it is indeed, by a blessed appointment of Providence, that one rich possession ever remains, of which neither the accidents nor the calamities, that take away all things else, can deprive them; — of which they cannot be bereaved, but by their own consent. How desirable to secure, — for we are able to secure, — that pleasing satisfaction, which must have sprung up in the mind of the Patriarch, — from reflecting that he could say, without presumption or self-

* Acts, xxiv. 16.

deceit, after Satan had applied trials which he had reason to believe were without remedy:—*All, however, is not yet lost:—my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go:—my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live**.

By the conscience void of offence, it is, however, by no means necessary to understand a mind entirely free from ANY self-reproach, on account of past misconduct. If this were strictly requisite, no peace could be promised, no encouragement offered, to any among the victims of despair: for no spotless conscience, corresponding to the description, could in all the world be found. And here it is, that the excellence of the Christian dispensation shines forth pre-eminently above all other religions. It would not, in circumstances of worldly despair, be very practicable, even for the most virtuous,—I would say for the most PRESUMPTUOUS Heathen or Deist, to find satisfaction from examining the chambers of his own heart, since he would there assuredly encounter, in the remembrance of many trespasses, and in the consciousness of much remaining infirmity, a source of anxious distrust with regard to his acceptance in the presence of a pure and a just God. But the religion of atonement provides a remedy for the past, the religion of grace a

* Job, xxvii. 6.

copious succour for the future : and in the mild and liberal interpretation of the Gospel, the unoffending conscience is held to signify no more than a conscience full of contrition, and faith, and humility, free from any present burden of habitual or presumptuous offence, and sincerely resolved on amendment and obedience, in reliance on the aids of Heaven, for the time to come. This it is fully in the power of fallen and frail creatures to obtain and to preserve:—and no man can be deemed sunk in the extremity of wretchedness, in absolute and entire despair, so long as he thus possesses that internal peace, which prognosticates quietness and assurance for ever. Blest in this ample source of satisfaction, if we cannot heal, we can at least much alleviate, the wounds of a broken spirit*.

From the statement now submitted, you will perceive it to follow as a corollary, that to those who hold the Christian faith, in its grand principles of mediation and communicated strength, no ground is afforded for any such gloomy feeling, as that of RELIGIOUS despair. Let no one, however criminal, imagine himself excluded from mercy, or fallen from good beyond the possibility of rising. The merits of the Saviour's passion are extended to the chief of sinners ; and even the frailest and the

* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

feeblest of mankind is encouraged to look up to a celestial Helper for a sufficiency, by which his trespasses will be removed,—his weakness invigorated. Though thy sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as the driven snow:—though they be deeper than crimson, they shall be as the purest wool*.

II. But while to those who are bereft of all present hope, we thus earnestly recommend, in general, the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, it seems necessary to inculcate, as more particularly indispensable to their possession of this invaluable treasure, the duty of entire *submission* to the blow which has cast them down, and of patient continuance unto the end in their sufferings, however exquisite and however hopeless. With such unhappy characters it is too common, we may express our fear, to dispense, in different degrees, with this important duty, without duly arraigning themselves at the bar of conscience. Too often do they regard the fulness of their cup of woe, as affording them a privilege for impatience and murmuring; not remembering that He to whose sorrow never sorrow was like, afforded them in his last extremity an example of the meekest submission. Nay, some among them, even Christian believers, in their dark

* Isaiah, i. 18.

and heavier moments, are known to have made endeavours, strange though it be to tell, to reconcile to their sense of religion and duty, the commission of that desperate and inexpiable act, in which nature is armed against itself. Persuading themselves, that since they are inevitably and completely cut off by Providence, from all enjoyment in the present scene, the Almighty who made them to be happy, is too good and merciful to be offended at their flying to the sole relief which remains to them, they have gone the length of justifying self-destruction on Christian principles, and of even ennobling it into a Christian virtue. "What father," it is asked, in a popular and insidious publication, "what father would not greet, with more than pity and forgiveness, with his warmest welcome, and his tenderest love, that son, who, able to find no happiness abroad, should hasten back to seek it in his presence?" A dangerous and most false suggestion, my brethren;—for observe, in the case of those to whom it is addressed in the world, the Father says, "Go forth for a season;—suffer what I inflict;—suffer it that ye may return meet for that inheritance which I prepare for you;—*I* am the judge when you shall have suffered enough:—and I will then, rest assured, call you to my home and presence:—but beware of returning until your summons shall arrive;—lest ye in-

trude before you have fully earned your offered remuneration ; lest ye share the sad lot of the unprofitable and disobedient ; and find too late that the unbidden desertion of your trial has only served to purchase for you a removal, from one scene of sorrow to another and a more intolerable.”

Again ;—There are certain cases of human despair, such, for example, as those of ruined reputation, or irremediable disease, which preclude the possibility, in many instances, of the sufferer’s continuing any longer to discharge, as formerly, the ordinary duties of his station in life ;—and under such circumstances he is apt, during his moods of dejection, to tell himself, that as man has been placed on this earth, solely, as it would appear, for purposes of utility, he, who is no longer an advantage or an ornament, but who has become a blot and an incumbrance to society, will act, not only excusably, but fitly, in delivering his brethren from the burden of their services, for which he has now no equivalent to offer ;—in leaving, voluntarily, a place where his presence is of no use, and from whence, he doubts not, his departure is desired.

But, my Christian brother, have you fully ascertained, or is it infallibly true, that the

ONLY end of your existence upon earth, is the production of advantage to others? How know you, but that the Almighty may have designs in placing you on trial, which centre exclusively in yourself? As he neither creates nor preserves in vain, is not this rendered, to say the least, probable (supposing for a moment that all power of utility whatever is taken away from you), by the very circumstance of your not being yet removed? May he not perceive that your heart is not yet thoroughly regenerated, and that a little longer space of endurance is necessary, in order to purify and to perfect you through suffering? Admitting, however, the extremely questionable doctrine, that utility to your brethren is the sole end of your present existence, have you duly considered whether you may not even still be useful to them,—HIGHLY useful, and that in the most essential points,—as a model of piety, as an example of resignation, as a monument of sore affliction, which may greatly serve to reconcile them to evils less severe than yours;—yet evils which the sufferers would deem altogether intolerable, unless they could be contrasted with others of a heavier nature*?

* These observations, it is trusted, afford a full answer to the contemptible sophistry of Rousseau, as contained in the 114th letter of his *Eloise*. “We have a right to put an end to our life, when it is no longer agreeable to ourselves, or advan-

But turning away from these speculative inquiries of reason, positive injunctions, it must be remembered, are laid down, which admit of but one construction, and from which there is no escape. Revelation places an insuperable barrier in your way. If you rely on its truths, you must receive its dictates: if you lay claim to its promises, you must submit to its restrictions. It becomes not us, indeed, to exercise rashness and violence in dealing the bolts of Heaven,—in deciding how fully the wrath of God will be exerted,—or how far his compassion may soften it, in the case of an offender, whose crime presupposes an overflowing cup of bitterness, and an exquisite perception of sorrow;—an affliction and a sensibility,

tageous to others." But our Werters and St. Preux's must please to recollect, that suicide, even on lower principles than they profess, may place them in a situation still less agreeable; and although the life of any such person may not hitherto have proved *very* advantageous to others, there is no point of suffering at which he can say, —it may not become so. The whole passage alluded to is a tissue of the most childish and inconclusive reasoning; and even the weak answer contained in the following letter gives up the point, in regard to bodily evils. —Suicide, according to Mr. Hume, in his legacy to posterity, is no more than the diversion of a quantity of blood into a different channel. It is a kind of general cupping.—This it is here needless to answer. —We are arguing with those who profess Christianity; and believe man to have an accountable soul.

without which the law of self-preservation, the natural tenacity of animated being to life, could not be violated. But when we look towards that light which alone ought to guide our steps, we cannot,—however we may commiserate the sufferings,—hold forth encouragement to the presumptuous hopes, of those who expect to sit down with their Lord in his kingdom, without being clad in the wedding garment of preparation. We must dismiss all comment where the text is plain. We must be *faithful unto death* if we would have *the crown of life* *. We must *continue unto the end* †, or we cannot be saved. We must *wait all the days of our appointed time, until our change cometh* ‡.

I would further remark, that these considerations, which seem sufficiently powerful to stay the hand of Despair, from perpetrating any act of DELIBERATE self-destruction, ought to be no less persuasive in recommending the avoidance of that slow but sure poison of pining sorrow, which, without any premeditated scheme of suicide, insensibly brings about a premature termination of existence. To indulge this gloomy dejection, it cannot be questioned, is boldly to oppose the will of Heaven;—for as such indulgence affects the sufferer himself, it criminally abridges the trial to which he is appointed by his Judge;—as it relates to his bre-

* Rev. ii. 10. † Matt, x. 22. ‡ Job, xiv. 14.

thren, it deprives them of that example of patience, which Heaven, in sending forth the grievous affliction, intended, doubtless, that he should exhibit.

I would not, however, be conceived as at all insinuating, that the unhappy individuals whose case is under contemplation, are required, or should be exhorted, too far to strain their feelings, to study an unnatural pitch of cheerfulness, or to struggle in the crowds of active life. A patient serenity, a meek submission to their lot, and a quiet and uniform, rather than an eager or very energetic, discharge of such offices as they are yet enabled to perform, constitute the whole which God or man can demand of those, in whose breasts the springs of action are broken,—and the object of attainment, and motive to exertion, have vanished. And although the victims of despair be strictly prohibited from hastening forward, whether by sudden or by slow means, their latter end, or from repining under the awards of Providence, I do not, I must confess, see any good reason, why, after all the duties now enumerated have been fulfilled, they should regard as sinful, if it afford them satisfaction, a pensive wish to be dismissed from their miseries. Paul, fully sensible of his utility upon

earth,—seeing before him new labours unto which Heaven had appointed him, deemed not presumptuous, when encompassed with troubles, the desire to depart, and to be with his Master *. The Saviour of the world himself, although he bowed to, and at length obeyed, the will of his heavenly Father, desired that he might be saved from the agonies of his last hour,—and that the cup, if possible, might be taken from his hands, before he should come to drink it to its bitterest dregs †.

When the counsels now offered shall have been carefully observed, all they who labour under hopeless sufferings may proceed, I will venture to pronounce, in full and confident security, to appropriate to their hearts the consolations of Scripture.

I. Consider, first, I beseech you, my suffering brethren, that your condition, however for the present helpless, is yet happily exempt from that *eternal* sorrow, which can alone truly merit the character of despair. When you remember that the earth contains individuals,—now perhaps abounding in its good things, and joyous in prosperity,—who shall be doomed to feel, throughout everlasting ages, what *you* experience only for a short, and continually

* Phil. i. 23.

† Luke, xxii. 42.

contracting season;—when you stand in imagination on the brink of the dreadful gulf, and cast a look downward on the place of punishment;—when you behold there, encircled with everlasting burnings, the truly hopeless bands of impenitent spirits, for ever banished from the presence of their God—from the light of his countenance, and the glory of his power,—without prospect of melioration, without possibility of change,—and finding all around them—INFINITE WRATH, and INFINITE despair;—when you witness the gnawings of the worm that dieth not;—when you listen to the wailings that shall never cease, and to the complaints of reprobate beings that sit clenching their hands, and cursing the day of their nativity;—when you yonder mark the livid flames, and the dun smoke of the torment that ascendeth for ever and ever*;—your own situation will brighten to your view;—you will dry up the tears that cover your face;—you will speak consolation and peace to your souls. You will return with cheerfulness to the path of obedience, although aware that it leads to no immediate recompense; and resolve to submit to your allotment of temporary despair, until it shall please God, in his good time, to terminate your tribulation and your trial.

* Rev. xiv. 11.

II. But the chief satisfaction of which your condition admits, consists in habitually directing forward your views, beyond the limits of this scene of trouble, to that region of pure, unspeakable enjoyment which awaits you, and of which the happiness will, in your case, be unquestionably heightened, by being contrasted with the misery, through which you will have reached it. How much more grateful is the calm and secure harbour to the shipwrecked mariner, than to the favourite of fortune, whose whole voyage has been prosperous! How much more acceptable is the festive entertainment, to a wretch perishing with hunger, than to the children of luxury who have fared sumptuously every day! How doubly pleasurable must be the fresh breeze of spring,—the warm and exhilarating return of the sun, to him who has long been acquainted with the gloom of a dungeon, or who has counted the sleepless hours on a bed of sickness! Even so, by the same natural force of contrast, will eternity afford an higher feeling of delight, to those servants of God who shall have come out of the heaviest—shall have come out of a HOPELESS tribulation; than to others whose lighter and every-day griefs have been cheered and consoled during the whole course of their earthly pilgrimage, with the smiling prospect of better fortune on the morrow! *O death! acceptable is thy sentence unto the needy, and unto him whose strength faileth;*

—*that is now in the last age, and is vaxed with all things ; and to him that departeth, and hath lost patience* *. If to such, even the transmission to insensibility and annihilation be thus desirable, how infinitely more acceptable that better passage, from galling fetters to unspeakable felicity ; —from total darkness to torrents of joy ; —from heaviness inconsolable, to happiness uninterrupted and unmixed !

Fix your thoughts then on that blessed moment, which at the furthest is not distant, — which each day of suffering is bringing nearer, —and which may possibly arrive more speedily than you have cause to believe ; —when you will bid farewell to the world and all its sorrows ; —and when Heaven and its glories will burst upon your sight. Dwell in forethought on the rapturous sensation which awaits you, at that mysterious, awful, pleasing moment, when the mouldering walls of your earthly tabernacle shall fall away, and when the disencumbered and imprisoned spirit will spring to the God who gave it : —when the hand of the ministering angel will unbar the everlasting gates, and when revealing to your sight the full tide of splendour, which beams forth from the holy city that is above, he will bid you enter into a joy that is yours for ever. Think of that transition

* Eccclus. xli. 2.

from all that is afflictive to all that is pleasurable,—to pleasures, of which your perception will, you need not doubt, be the more vivid, as your earthly sufferings have been more poignant and protracted.

To sum up the whole;—(for you will pardon the earnest repetition,) let every individual for whom no further happiness remains in the present commencement of existence, be moved by all the foregoing admonitions and consolations, to beware of casting away that happiness of the world to come, which is now his last and only stake. You have experienced **ONE** world to be a scene of misery, unabating, unceasing, and uncheered;—see (for to make the provision is now in your own power) that you do not likewise make the **OTHER** so. Do you grieve for a reputation blasted among men? The trial is a sore one;—but look beyond the grave. **IMMORTAL HONOUR** is yet within your grasp:—**AT LEAST** secure **THIS**, by continuing faithful in disgrace. Has the friend of your confidence been removed from your side? Inseparable reunion is presented to your expectations:—yet remember that the path of perseverance is the only way to it. Do you carry about in the body infirmities for which there is no remedy?—It is yet yours to hope for a happy transformation into the likeness of Christ's glorious body* ;—

* Phil. iii, 21.

forfeit not then this reversionary blessing, by any present rash deed, or wilful disobedience.

Go, inspired with the humble resolution, that although the fig-tree shall never more blossom ;—although the withered vine yield no hope of fruit ;—though form, or fortune, or fame, or friends, be gone, gone for ever,—you will yet love and serve the God of your salvation :—that you will wait without a murmur under irreparable evils, until HE who alone knoweth what is truly good for you, shall determine that your patience has been perfected by experience ;—that the end of your trials, the morning of your joy, the day of your deliverance, is arrived ; that the measure of your affliction is full ;—and that the sufferer may depart in peace.

S E R M O N X V I I . *

FOR AN INFIRMARY.

I JOHN, CHAP. IV. VERSE 21.

And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.

THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with thy soul, thy heart, and thy strength, is a maxim set forth by our blessed Master, as being the first and great commandment. And when we consider, that it is God in whom we live and move, that to his providence we are indebted for the bounties and delights of nature, and for whatever comforts are mingled in our respective conditions:—when we further reflect, that this same God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; that our spirits, ransomed by the blood of that divine Personage, are renewed and purified by an influence, of which he is likewise the author; and that the Father will bestow the unmerited blessing of eternal

* The latter part of this Sermon has been substituted for the same portion of another, preached in behalf of the Female Charity School of St. Pancras; which it was my original intention to have published:

life on every one who shall seek it in the manner he hath pointed out;—all of us, I am persuaded, will feel and confess the strict propriety of that injunction which demands the tribute of our love; and the hearts of all will glow with the warmest affection, towards a Being so good, so gracious, and so bountiful.

So influential over conduct indeed is this great principle of love;—so naturally does it tend, when professed in sincerity, to produce an earnest and sedulous observance of the will,—an imitation of the perfections, and an endeavour to promote the glory, of the Supreme Object of attachment;—that in various parts of the sacred volume it is exhibited to us, as alone comprising all the obligations of man. *Keep yourselves in the LOVE of God* (writes St. Jude), *looking for the mercy of Christ unto eternal life**. St. Paul declares, that all things work together for good unto them that LOVE God †:—and again, in a different passage, that eye hath not seen, nor heart conceived, what God hath prepared for them that LOVE him ‡.

Unfortunately, there have existed in all ages of the Christian church,—a class of ill-informed (for we are forbidden by Christian charity, to pronounce them ill-meaning) individuals,—who, misinterpreting such compendious descriptions

* Jude, 21.

† Rom. viii. 28.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

of duty;—mistaking the spring for the river, the foundation for the complete edifice,—have confined their love of the Deity to an inactive fervour, or to impassioned, but unmeaning protestations of attachment. To obviate these partial, contracted views, and misconceived notions of obedience, the word of truth, in other places, speaks more amply and explicitly;—defining this term of love towards our heavenly Master, as comprehending the principles and moral duties of his servants;—as embracing the faith of the mind and heart,—as annexing to the adoration of the lips, repentance and holiness in the conduct. *Whoso KEEPETH the word of God, in him verily is the love of God perfected**. *If ye love me, keep my commandments †*; so shall I be assured,—in this manner only can you assure YOURSELVES, that the professions of love which you utter are sincere,—and that the devout affections of which your hearts are conscious, are unequivocally the earnest of salvation.

Among the commandments, of which the observance is, in such passages, enjoined, as a test and manifestation of affection for the Supreme Being;—no one appears more frequently insisted on, than charity exercised towards the bodies and souls,—compassion, alive to the present necessities, and the everlasting interests, of our brethren. *He that loveth God, will love his*

* 1 John, ii. 5.

† John, xiv. 15.

*brother also. Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion against his brother, how dwelleth the love of God in him *?*

If we are anxious to ascertain the reason for this reference of the love of God, to love towards our neighbour;—to discover the bond which connects a sentiment or emotion, having the Creator of the universe for its object,—with active services towards the creatures of his hands,—we shall find it to be a necessary consequence of the nature of that Creator. As God is to us the author of every good and perfect gift, we evidently owe him, in return for his bounties, something more than the warmth of feelings, and the breath of protestations;—we are bound to make some return of active service;—to offer before his altar, as a tribute of gratitude, some substantial proof of our professed attachment.

How then is this to be done? On Him, personally, we can confer no favour. He is all-powerful, and needs not our assistance. He is supremely happy, and we can add nothing to his enjoyment. He hath himself, in the person of his divine Son, graciously resolved this difficulty; *Inasmuch as ye shall do it unto one of these your brethren—ye do it unto me †.*

1 John, iv. 21.—iii. 17.

† Matt. xxv. 40.

Foremost, therefore, among all arguments, whether recommending charity in general, or any specific modification of almsgiving, ought ever to be placed its propriety and indispensableness, when considered as an indication of the love which we profess, and a tribute of the gratitude which we owe, to Almighty God. And I here feel the more strongly inclined to insist on this generous principle of benevolence,—as I am aware that, in the present age of sordid calculation, an infirmity into which men are but too prone to fall, and which public solicitors of their bounty, I fear, are but too apt to encourage,—is the administration of relief to their indigent brethren, on the low, selfish, mercenary ground, of the expectation of a temporal equivalent. We are invited to encourage the friendly societies of the lower orders, because we may thereby expect to diminish our parish rates. Education, we are told, instils principles of honesty; and on this account, we are interested in supporting establishments for the instruction of our poorer brethren, since we thus contribute to the future preservation of our own property. Far from our breasts, my Christian hearers, and far from an edifice of Christian worship, be driven (when regarded as the exclusive, or even as the leading motive of our bounty) such cold, creeping, despicable conceptions.—Far were they from the mind of Him who is our great pattern of com-

passion:—far alike from the tenour of his conduct and the spirit of his instructions. When a sojourner upon earth, he went about doing good unto those, who, he knew, were to repay him with a crown of mockery, and a cross of shame. When delivering his precepts, he exhorted his disciples to do good, and lend—hoping for nothing again*. In a word;—let us at all times, when a claim upon our benevolence presents itself, recollect our duty of attachment to the Father of mercies; and from that fountain, our alms will liberally flow. For, in truth, after we have done all—we are unprofitable servants;—and, after we have GIVEN all—we remain indebted unto Heaven.

Yet, although this disinterested and high motive of beneficence ought ever to be pre-eminently distinguished, there are inferior inducements which Heaven, in compassion, hath addressed to the understanding and the heart, with a view to quicken our sympathy, and to expedite our services of relief.

Thus, with reference to that proud and noble Institution, for the support of which it is this morning my allotted province, to entreat a continuance of your assistance,—it must at once occur to every mind, that combined operation for the relief of the sick, is incalculably more

• Luke, vi. 35.

powerful and extensive in its efficacy, than acts of separate and individual bounty. Did each of the contributors to the public Charity for which I plead, withhold his donation on the plea of expending it in his own neighbourhood, how trifling would be the sum of benefit he could confer!—Medical attendance for the indigent sick around him, his pittance of alms could not amply procure; and even if it were sufficient for the purchase of a few medicines, who is to direct the nature and composition of the remedies, adapted to each patient's particular case;—or (what seems of hardly inferior consequence) the measures of these remedies to be administered? How is the sick man's diet to be regulated, and the progress of his disease to be watched; each favourable symptom to be turned to advantage, and the spark of life, trembling betwixt animation and extinction, to be cherished and blown into a flame? How unfavourable to recovery are the miserable accommodations of a hovel, where the sick man's aching head may be distressed by the needful labour of other members of the household, or his feeble limbs benumbed under insufficient coverings;—and where almost every circumstance is unfavourable to that undisturbed rest and improved comfort, which constitute no trifling portion of his chances for convalescence!

But, remove the patient to an hospital; and how different a scene presents itself!—In addition to the advantages of repose and cleanliness, of convenient accommodation, and of suitable food, he here finds the physician, the surgeon, the apothecary, the nurse, and the menial attendant, all uniting their separate exertions for his welfare—exertions, directed by skill, improved by habit, perfected by confinement to a single branch of the common labour, and quickened, as well by tenderness towards the sufferer, as by a sense of public inspection, and a regard for personal reputation.—All these benefits result from the same principle which facilitates the preservation, and cheapens the price, of the common conveniences and elegances of life, by a system of connected and consolidated operations. An Infirmary may be regarded as a large manufactory;—where a vast variety of wheels and spindles are set in motion by the power of one engine;—where each performs his share of the work with the greater dexterity, as his attention is concentrated to it;—and where the accumulation of capital in a single hand, creates an economy in room, light, heat, machinery, and general labour,—which it were hopeless to expect, did each private family attempt to manufacture the commodity under their own roof*.

* NOTE.—This Discourse was preached in a manufacturing town.

In a large and populous town,—especially where strong furnaces, and sharp or ponderous instruments are necessarily employed, in preparing the staple article of sale,—I need not specify the variety of sudden dangers, to which the poor and labouring classes are exposed. How felicitous an invention then must be that of a sanctuary, to which the sufferer by accident may instantly be carried, and where his case will certainly be considered without delay! In the absence of such public head-quarters of relief, the unfortunate individual who had received a contusion in a fall, or a wound from an enraged animal;—who had been lacerated by steel, or scalded by flame,—would be surrounded by a gazing multitude, ignorant whither they should remove him;—or, perhaps, conveyed in a painful litter from house to house, in quest of a precarious private assistance.

An institution thus open for the reception of patients labouring under every modification of human ailment, further affords an excellent school of medical knowledge, to pupils and young practitioners in the science. Here theoretic skill is exemplified by practical exertion; and a combination of oral instruction and ocular demonstration, admits the inexperienced student to a knowledge of his profession, which

books alone would be utterly inadequate to impart. It must be highly grateful then to the philanthropic mind to reflect, that in ministering to the wants of the indigent sick, it is opening sluices of health which will, in a few years, descend to refresh the general body of the community.

With many among those who hear me, there is a peculiar argument, of no inconsiderable force, which I shall without scruple press upon their *recollection*, not doubting that it has frequently presented itself to their minds.—That we all are indebted for many conveniences of life to the necessary toil of men whom Providence hath placed beneath us in station, ought surely to be a motive for our supporting under disease, those who, when in health, had contributed to our accommodation.—But perhaps the majority of hearers at this time assembled, hold their present situation of opulence or of comfort, in consequence of the success of large concerns, in which the members employed have been drawn from the labours of agriculture, to a mode of earning their livelihood far less salutary. I would not here be understood as instituting any invidious comparison betwixt the manufactures and the agriculture of this happy country: for its agriculture, in-

deed, is necessarily improved, in proportion as its manufactures flourish.—Neither would I insinuate the slightest hint of disrespect towards an honourable occupation, which bestows on Great Britain, wealth, pride, credit, and dominion;—which, while it furnishes the sinews of war, encourages all the arts, the elegances, and the ornaments of peace. It is sufficient for my argument, that in that stage of refinement in the natural march of society, to which we are arrived, the advantages acquired are, unhappily, not unattended with a certain quantity of evil. For, if it cannot be denied, that large towns, and chiefly large manufacturing towns, are considerably less favourable to health and morals, than the open country, the village, and the hamlet;—that they foster, in the lower orders, vices of intemperance and licentiousness, which fatally tend to undermine the constitution;—if it be certain that, by reason of sedentary occupations, amidst unctuous substances, floating shreds, or sulphureous effluvia,—in close and crowded workrooms,—humours accumulating in the human frame lay the foundation of much ailment, which would not have existed, if such humours had been freely dispersed, by a circulation of pure air, and by salutary exercise:—if this, I say, be admitted, then, consequently, it is most reasonable, that individuals who enjoy the first and chief benefit accruing from such

a state of society, should be the most prompt, forward, and liberal in contributing towards a redress of the evils that are inseparable from it. It cannot be questioned, that no small number of the cases of disease which are presented to the Infirmary of this place, have originated immediately, or, at least, by inherited complaint, either in unwholesome labour, or in licentious conduct, both connected with a state of crowded population, and of sophisticated living. The claim then upon all of us, who either immediately, or by inheritance, find a bank and treasury in property, arising from causes which have inevitably, it would seem, drawn such consequences in their train, must be a claim exceedingly strong: it must even, I think, amount to something resembling a debt. In requesting your assistance, therefore, towards the support of an institution designed and calculated for the alleviation of such evils, I feel the ground beneath me to be firm.—I refuse to solicit it of humanity;—I demand it at the hands of justice. I cannot wholly submit to sue for that as an alms, which, in the poor man's name, I can call for as his right.

But, since *vices*, as well as disease, is generated by such a condition of society, as that which we have been here contemplating, the voluntary abatement of its evils would be incomplete, if

wise and humane measures were not adopted and pursued, for the welfare of the soul, as well as of the body;—for the amendment of morals, not less than the restoration of health. In a congregation convened for religious purposes,—in an assembly composed of the professors of a religion expressly designed at once to promote the glory of God, and to circulate wishes of peace and good-will towards men,—it would be unpardonable not to suggest, that in the excellent regulation relative to the weekly devotions of your Infirmary, provision is made for the probability of awakening the sick man, to serious views concerning the brevity of life, the importance of religion, and the welfare of his imperishable spirit. In the gaiety of health, and in the bustle of worldly occupation, the still small voice of conscience is too likely to be unheard, and the hopes and fears of religion to be disregarded or postponed. But let the unthinking individual be stretched out upon a sick bed, and let him be driven to introspection by the absence of mad hilarity, or by the suspension of anxious employment;—and then it is that the accents of adoration, and the dictates of divine truth, will chime in harmony with the state of his reflections,—will steal on his enfeebled frame, his subdued spirits, and his serious composure, grateful and soothing as is the soft-

est music to the soul in her most pensive and meditative mood. It is extremely probable that, under divine grace, in this happy combination of religion and opportunity, the sweet sounds of the Gospel of peace and truth, may not return void from the ears in which they shall be uttered;—and that a seed may be sown in the hearts of many transgressors,—springing up, by the blessing of God, unto eternal life. And the full effect of so benevolent an agency is secured, by a circumstance peculiar (so far as I know) to your Institution, and highly creditable to the feelings, the piety, and the ingenuity of those who planned the interior of the structure. Having been recently called upon in rotation to officiate, in the place of the respected minister for whom I am an unworthy substitute, it afforded me particular pleasure to observe the contrivance in the chapel for extending the sound of its devotions to the apartments of the bedridden, the loathsome, and the dying;—an improvement which I cannot recollect having observed in other institutions of the kind which I have visited*.

In the present age of wild and extravagant liberality, it would perhaps only involve me in the imputation of bigotry, if I were to presume

* Four windows in the walls of the chapel open into their wards.

to subjoin—as an additional subject of congratulation,—that the electric spark of conversion is not transmitted through empirical hands;—that the spiritual health is imparted by a regular and accredited physician of the soul;—that the offending right-hand is amputated, in a moral as well as in a literal sense, by scientific, experienced, and humane practitioners;—that an attempt is made to couch every offending right eye, before it be rudely plucked out and cast away;—that the poor man is not intoxicated by the stimulants of enthusiasm into presumption, or, by the attenuants of groundless fear reduced to despair;—but receives a moral medicine which lays the foundation of permanent health—through the medium of a reasonable religion, and of the half-inspired Liturgy of the Church of England.

I am aware that many highly respectable individuals are numbered in the present congregation, with respect to whom so large a variety of arguments as I have now employed may be deemed superfluous;—I am aware that those who are of the greatest opulence and consideration, are likewise the most distinguished for their munificence towards charitable establishments. Yet, at the same time, I am not so inexperienced in my profession, or so entirely ignorant of the human heart, as not to know likewise, that the

usual result of such discourses as the present, is a collection which might have been computed nearly with as unerring an accuracy, as any number of votes that may have been determined by venality, before debate upon the matter in question has commenced. Reports have reached our ears of the astonishing effects frequently produced by charity sermons in our sister island—in the land of generous sensibility—some emptying purses—or pencilling their promissory notes: Christian ladies, forgetful of their ornaments,—and doubtless, when so unadorned, adorned the most—unbuckling the girdle, and unclasping the bracelet, like Roman matrons, for a public cause;—content to part with their index of time, that they may secure the bliss of eternity,—and cheerfully divesting themselves of their richest jewels, for the sake of purchasing the pearl of inestimable price. Here, where eloquence is weaker, where judgments are more cold, and imaginations less lively, any effects of this description it were frenzy to expect. Yet why should the two scenes exhibit so strong a contrast? Why, in a promiscuous assemblage, should there be found grudging servants, who, year after year, approach with their single and solitary talent, wrapt up in a napkin; and though they know it to be much less than they could conveniently spare, would hardly be prevailed upon by lips touched with

fire, to add to it the most insignificant appendix. These, if such be present, I would fain prevail with to alter so cold and calculating a mode of administering their beneficence;—not solely with a view to the present transient occasion, but as the commencement of a generous and honourable habit, of sometimes bestowing a trifle more than they had intended.

There is a different description of characters, equally difficult to impress, who are come with a fixed predetermination to give the munificence of nothing, on the plea that their contributions are already subscribed in another form. Now I will freely admit it to be highly proper and necessary, that the rich should make some ostensible demonstration to their poorer brother of their not being totally forgetful of his interests. But though donations thus blazoned may, in many instances, be presented with the most refined and upright views, the danger is extreme, lest the motives to such bounty be mingled with some small leaven of a lurking self-delusion. If, therefore, such individuals would fully satisfy their own consciences, and approve themselves before God—as bringing their tribute of pity from unadulterated motives—as entirely free from all wish to blow a trumpet before their alms—and to flourish in the column of an annual report;—let them, in addition to that public manifestation of their sympathy, which

their situation in society demands, utter a prayer in a whisper, and bestow an alms without noise;—so that God alone, and not their neighbour, and not even their left hand, may know what their right hand doeth.

In the classic periods of antiquity, it was a custom among public speakers, when summing up their defence of an accused client, to introduce into the court, and to exhibit before the judges, his wife and children, his kindred and friends, vested in the solemnity of mourning apparel, clasping their hands in speechless supplication, and dissolved in all the mute eloquence of tears. The calmer state of our feelings, and the soberer character of our manners, forbid the employment of any similar expedients, in attempting to excite commiseration. Indeed, were it permitted, unhappy circumstances, on the present occasion, would render it altogether impracticable. But, my brethren, were I gifted with those rich powers of description, which drag things absent, as it were, before the view, and tinge the faint outlines of conception with the glowing colours of reality, I would present to you,—a band of supplicants amply sufficient to enforce, with the strongest appeal to your best and tenderest emotions, all the various arguments which have now been col-

lected. I would picture to you the circle of sick men and sick women, silently arranged round the fire of a ward, and contemplating, each in the wasted forms, and in the sallow countenances of his companions—the resemblance of his own image—the earnest and presage of his own mortality. I would represent the incision made with the keen knife, upon the delicate breast of snow,—the agonies of the frame parting for ever with its limb,—and all its spouting arteries, and shrinking sinews, and quivering nerves. I would conduct you from one scene of suffering to another;—here direct your attention to feebleness leaning on his staff;—there, to the issue of blood that has run for twelve years,—or to the sight that has been darkened in fighting, amidst the burning sands of Egypt, the honourable battles of your country. I would bid you look on dropsy heaving his labouring chest,—on asthma struggling for breath,—on abscess, and ague, and rheumatic pain, and pining atrophy, and decay sinking into the tomb. I would conduct you to the bed of the dying man;—I would beseech you to mark that pale form, those sunken eyeballs, that look of mingled agony and meekness;—the dim eye, half raised upon you as you approach;—the stifled attempt to speak,—and the speaking look, that vainly asks for intermission from pain;—the smile of gratitude for the few comforts enjoyed,

and of seeming entreaty that they may be long continued to others in the like situation. would arrest your steps until you contemplated the closing scene,—until you beheld the child of poverty resigning his spirit, encompassed by tenderness—but often by the tenderness of strangers:—and when I had displayed to you this complicated variety of human wretchedness;—when I had drawn you through scenes exhibiting so many forms and shapes of woe,—I would then turn round to acquaint you that these scenes,—piteous as they may have been to your eyes, and repulsive to your feelings, constitute—the luxury,—the mercy, which the sick man requires. It is to deliver him from the accumulation of poverty upon disease;—from the hut, scarce proof against the inclemencies of the weather; from anxious forebodings respecting the future prospects of his family—bodings continually suggested by their presence, and continually aggravating his complaint;—from disquieting noise, and meagre fare, and cheerless cold, and death upon the pallet of straw:—it is for these ends that you are now about to administer your bounty. By administering it cheerfully—for God loveth a cheerful giver;—by administering it plentifully—for he that soweth plentifully shall reap also plentifully;—you are about to rank yourselves high among that happy multitude, to whom your Saviour, in the end

of the world, identifying himself with the wretched, will thus address himself—I was an-hungered, and ye fed me;—sick, and ye visited me;—a stranger, and ye took me in. In doing it to your fellow-disciples, ye did it unto their Master. Mine be the thanks, and mine the satisfaction of rewarding. Ascend, and receive the recompense of your labours: Enter into the joy of your Lord.

S E R M O N XVIII.

ON MINISTERING SPIRITS.

PSALM CIII. VERSE 20.

Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments.

THE ministration of angels, in relation to human beings, is a subject, to which, though extremely interesting, Christian instructors have not in general been accustomed to direct the attention of their people; and in regard to which, the notions of the great body of believers are much less correct and definite, than their knowledge of most other branches of their faith. Some have conceived the subject to be one better calculated for the fervours of enthusiasm, or the flights of poetry, than for the sober views of a rational and practical religion: while others have dreaded it as the parent of superstition, as likely to betray the mind into an imperfect idolatry; to divide the affections and devotions of the heart betwixt the Creator, the only object of lawful worship, and some of his created beings.

Yet nothing can be more certain than that such intelligences exist;—that they are interested in the affairs of this lower world;—that they walk abroad in the earth, and are sent on errands of mercy;—that although they be invisible, we are surrounded by a cloud of them; and that they often have interfered, and are still employed for the succour and benefit of good and pious men. *Are they not all ministering spirits, says the Apostle to the Hebrews, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*?*

We can hardly indeed open the sacred volume, without discovering instances or intimations of the interposition and agency of these ambassadors of the Almighty Sovereign. At the birth of the world, they seem to have betimes anticipated their future interest in the welfare of its inhabitants;—it is difficult, at least, to assign any other meaning to the expression—*When the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy* †. Accordingly, in the earliest ages, we find them continually appearing to the Patriarchs; to comfort in affliction,—to warn in the hour of danger,—to rescue from difficulties,—and to encourage to perseverance in holiness.

* Heb. i. 14.

† Job, xxxviii. 7.

It is one of these celestial agents, who leads the afflicted Hagar to the well of the wilderness. Angels deliver Lot and his family, from the destruction of the sinful city. An angel stays the hand of Abraham, when lifted up to immolate his son. An angel moves in the directing pillar of fire, which precedes the camp of the Israelites.—To stop the way of Balaam;—to carry food unto Elijah;—to smite the host of the Assyrians, when encamped against the people of God, we observe the same holy ministration employed. In the New Testament these messengers of Heaven are represented as mingling their agency in the scheme of salvation, and as extending, together with the Gospel, their concern, from the Jewish people to the whole race of mankind. Is the birth of the Baptist to be announced to Zacharias?—Are the fears of Joseph respecting the purity of his betrothed wife to be dispelled?—Are the shepherds to be directed where they shall find the Babe, that bringeth good tidings unto them and unto all people?—Is a favourable answer to be given to the prayers of Cornelius?—Is Philip to be instructed how he shall enlighten the Ethiopian?—or Paul to be encouraged amidst the terrors of the storm?—The Lord sends forth his ministering spirits, on all these embassies of condescension or of love. No one, in a word, can doubt their interposition, unless from

that evil heart of unbelief, which proudly calls in question every article of faith, that lies beyond the limits of ordinary experience:—that heart possessed of old by the Sadducees, who, it is recorded, while they denied the existence of angels, *said likewise that there is no resurrection**.

Not then, surrendering ourselves to this partial infidelity, and taking for granted the existence and the agency of guardian spirits,—let us endeavour to investigate in what respects, and to what extent, their interposition is exerted, and may be expected, in our behalf.

I. The lowest occupation of tutelary beings upon the earth, the lowest, as it is an employment relating to our temporal welfare, consists in the preservation or deliverance of the servants of God from situations of danger. To be conscious, that whithersoever we may bend our steps;—in the midst of the throng, or in the solitary path,—these celestial protectors are at all times beside us, to execute the will of the Deity in screening us from evil, or in delivering us when we shall have fallen into it,—to avert misfortunes which no human precaution could avoid,—to encompass as with a shield, and to cover as with a canopy;—must doubtless be an animating and soothing reflection. Yet the believer may rest assured, that this is

* Acts, xxiii. 8.

no fanciful supposition, since it is written,—and he may humbly appropriate to himself the promise,—*He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, in all thy ways, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone**. No one, however, I trust, will infer from this assurance, that the care of unseen protectors will, in any degree, dispense with the strictest personal vigilance; since it must immediately occur to all, that we are commanded to *walk circumspectly* †; and since it is subjoined more particularly to the passage above quoted, *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*.

How helpless is man in the season of repose!—to what a variety of accidents is he then laid open!—All that sagacity, and all those precautions, which he may have diligently employed during his waking hours,—precautions which have taught many to forget the Omnipotent Ruler, and to arrogate the power of self-protection and deliverance,—are now no longer of any avail.—Nevertheless, the faithful servant of an Almighty Ruler, may both lay him down, and sleep, in peace; for *the angel of the Lord*, says the inspired Psalmist, *encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them* ‡. The appearance of these messengers and delegates of Heaven, in-

* Psalm xci. 11, 12. Zech. i. 10. compared with Rev. v. 6. and Dan. x. 13—20. † Eph. v. 15. ‡ Psalm xxxiv. 7.

deed, in the silent vigils of the night, unto holy men under the old and new dispensations;—to Jacob at Bethel,—to Joseph at Nazareth,—to Peter in prison;—although it cannot certainly encourage us, in these latter times, to expect the same miraculous intimations,—should, at least, forbid the true believer to doubt, that invisible spirits, like *eyes of God* *, are continually awake around him;—that, like feathers of the wing of Providence, they are stretched over his repose;—that He whose chariots are ten thousands of angels, is accompanied by these fiery squadrons, and makes use of their ministration in *keeping watch about the bed*, as well as about the path of the faithful †.

Nor can it be reasonably questioned,—that those secret impulses and silent whispers, which sometimes prevent men from entering on a way where the robber lurks, or embarking in a vessel which is about to be wrecked,—are to be ascribed to the gentle imperceptible agency of the same celestial guides. Every day, every hour, we walk amidst dangers and deaths, and know nothing of the innumerable occasions in which we are conveyed through them in safety, by the ministry of unseen, but propitious hands. Some among us may, at this moment, tremble while they call to mind escapes, which the coldest incredulity could not attribute to acci-

* Zech. iv. 10.

† Psalm lxxviii, 17.—cxxxix, 3.

dent: and it seems fair to infer, that, for effecting these, the Almighty commissioned some subordinate intelligences. Was it not by his angel that he delivered the three holy children who trusted in him, from the midst of the burning fiery furnace*? Was it not by an angel that the mouths of the lions were stopped, when the innocent Daniel was thrown down into their den †? Was it not by a similar deliverer that Peter was led forth from prison, through the iron gate that opened of its own accord,—while a light from heaven illuminated the dungeon? Every servant of Heaven then may go forth daily into the world, conceiving that such a spirit is not far distant; and listening in idea to the words, with which, in visitations of old, the messages of these pure beings were frequently prefaced:—*Fear not ‡.*

II. The next office, in which Scripture warrants us to believe, that guardian spirits, who are aptly described as HANDS of the Divine Beneficence, are engaged, is the interesting task of bearing consolation to the afflicted. To diffuse an holy calm throughout the troubled mind;—to pour forth into the wounded bosom their pitcher of refreshment, drawn from the

* Dan. iii. 28.

Dan. vi. 22.

† Acts, xii. 15.—Gen. xlvi. 16.—Matt. xviii. 10.

rivers of Paradise;—to impart a consciousness of being accompanied in the hour of solitude;—of being supported in seasons of danger;—of being soothed, and cheered, and strengthened, in apprehension, in pain, or in perplexity;—to suggest considerations which recommend submission or fortitude;—are employments not unsuitable to that heavenly host, concerning whom we know, that one of them stirred the pool of Bethesda, in preparation for the cure of the maimed;—that some came and ministered unto the Son of Man, after his fasting and temptation in the wilderness; that some comforted him in his agony; while others, after his resurrection, appeared to his desponding Apostles in white apparel, and uttered the consolatory language,—*Fear not ye; Jesus whom ye seek is not here, for he is risen:—he shall come again from heaven in like manner as he hath departed thither**.

III. Still stronger reasons must we allow are there for believing, that these ethereal spirits are greatly occupied, as messengers of grace in time of temptation;—as servants sent forth by the Holy Ghost into the breast, suggesting good, or banishing unholy thoughts;—as turning away the eye from the seductive spectacle, or sealing the ear to accents of delusion. Of the evil which constitutes temptation, a large

* Acts, i. 11.

portion, it is certain, is derived immediately from the suggestion of our ghostly enemy. If both the trial of Eve, and that of our Lord himself, be insufficient to assure us as to the truth of this assertion,—Satan's being called, by way of eminence, the tempter, and the description given of him, as a roaring lion going about in the earth, and seeking whom he may devour,—evince his continual practice. Since then the evil spirit is ever active in attempting to alienate man from the love and practice of holiness, does it not seem quite consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, as well as conformable to the general economy of his providence, to oppose to him, in such measure as shall leave the human mind at liberty to turn the balance, the inspiration of a more benevolent Being,—of the Spirit of grace and truth? It may, however, be asked,—Since the Holy Ghost *himself* has been revealed, and his influence poured out upon the children of men, where is the necessity for having recourse to any other, to any inferior operation? To this I answer, We may suppose the presiding care of angels,—not as *superseding*, not as in the slightest degree DI-VIDING the influence of the great Spirit of spirits; but as acting in subservience to him for the maintenance of his dignity, as the servants of his will, and the bearers of his blessings. Does it at all abridge the authority, does

it not rather enhance the magnificence of an *earthly* sovereign, to be surrounded with servants, officers, and courtiers, the dispensers of his favours, and the executioners of his decrees? We well know, that in spiritual intimations, as well as in the daily order and economy of Providence, the Deity delights to conceal himself, and to act by intermediate agency. We speak of sermons, of sicknesses, of afflictions, of a place of graves, as *means* of grace;—wherefore, then, should not we, in like manner, speak of angels as its *dispensers*? We cannot tell, indeed, whether obedience to the divine command, in attending to the interests of human beings, may not be, on their part, an act of probation: for to a trial they are not impossibly still subjected: some of them at least, we know, were at one time capable of falling, and did fall. If, however, it should be presumed, that their probation is now at an end, and that they are at present assured of eternal life, still it is in the highest degree reasonable to believe, that the office of transmitting the suggestions of grace may be imposed on them, on their *own* account, as intelligences, whom it becomes to praise the Father of the Universe, and to purify and approximate towards perfection their own natures, by active services as well as by hymns of adoration. It is natural to suppose, likewise,

that pure and benevolent beings, permitted to witness the affairs of this lower world, should feel deeply interested for the favourable issue of the spiritual conflict sustained by those who may become their future and eternal associates:—and, if by any means possible, that they should exert themselves in promoting that issue. Add to this, that as the Omniscient, who knoweth our necessities before we ask, requires us nevertheless to state them in prayer;—as He who witnesseth our secret contrition, demands that it should be expressed in a confession of the lips;—so may it please the same Being, who in one sense is immediately present to our souls, to employ a subordinate agency as the vehicle of the succour he conveys to them from that heaven of heavens, which, in another sense, he is represented as making the peculiar habitation of his glory*.

Satan, the enemy of all good upon earth, is frequently spoken of in the sacred volume, in conjunction with his subject spirits:—we read of the Prince and the emissaries of darkness; of the Devil and his angels †.—These,

* Psalm xxxiii. 14.

† Matt. xxv. 41. and xii. 24. 26.—Ephes. ii. 2. and vi. 12.—Coloss. ii. 15.—Psalm lxxviii. 49. compared with Exod. xii. 23.—1 Sam. xvi. 14.—2 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17.—2 Kings, xix. 35.—Matt. xiii. 19.—2 Cor. ii. 11.; iv. 4.; and xi. 3, 4, 14, 15.—1 Thessal. iii. v.—2 Thessal. ii. 9, 10.—Acts, v. 3.—John, xiii. 27.—1 Thessal. ii. 18.

there is every reason to be assured, are still leagued together, in the malignant work of envy and destruction: nor can it be supposed that the inferior fiends who lost their first estate, any more than the arch-enemy, the master-adversary, have unbuckled the armour of rebellion, or in any degree abated in their malice and enmity, towards God, and towards all his works and creatures. It may be consistent, then, with the dignity of the Spirit of God, though himself all-powerful and all-pervading, to set HIS OWN attendant spirits in array, against this band of inveterate foes: and indeed some divines have considered that war, which is described in the book of Revelations as carried on in heaven, by Michael and his angels, against the dragon and his angels*, —as being, in its secondary meaning, an allegorical representation of this supposed contest betwixt good and evil spirits, for the possession of the human soul.

Upon the whole, at once to secure the benefits, and to guard against the slightest perversion of this doctrine, let us bless Almighty God for having enveloped us with so many ministers of his will:—and receive, with satisfaction, that reflection of divinity, those suggestions of holiness, that air of purity which

* Rev. xii. 7.—Zech. iii. 1, 2.

they bring unto our souls from the face of our Heavenly Father, which we know that *they always behold**; or, in whose presence, as it is elsewhere expressed, *their hosts stand with trembling* †. But let us remember also, that as angels do not, in any degree, encroach on the office of the eternal Sanctifier, they as little participate his uncommunicable dignity:—they are humble ministers,—beings a little higher than ourselves, but still created, still charged with folly ‡:—pure, exalted friends, to be venerated and loved; but not divinities to be worshipped. *And when I saw the angel, I fell at his feet to worship him;—and he said unto me, See thou do it not; I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus:—worship God* § Reserving adoration, then, for the Supreme Being alone, let us learn, from the example of these unseen sons of light, to execute the divine commandments with promptitude;—to condescend to those beneath us in condition;—to take delight in succouring the necessitous and unhappy:—thus doing the will of our Father on earth, as it is executed towards ourselves by the beatified spirits of heaven.

IV. If to bear from above the emanations of grace, be an office, in which pure and kind

* Matt. xviii. 10.

† 2 Esdras, viii. 2.

‡ Psalm viii. 5. Job, iv. 18.

§ Rev. xix. 10.

intelligences may be supposed to take high delight, with still greater satisfaction, may it further be presumed, do they wing their way back to the courts of happiness, carrying tidings of the successful result of their embassy. *I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and before the glory of the Holy One**. Worthy employment, to waft pure thoughts to the fountain of purity;—pious breathings into the presence of the great object of adoration; and the record of holy actions to the ministering spirit who registers them for the great day of the Lord;—or at times, perhaps, while that spirit is, with strict fidelity, entering some offence of surprise or infirmity, to snatch with a smile the pen from his hand, and, commissioned by Him who alone hath power of forgiving sin, to erase the half-finished accusation. By assigning this occupation to those delegates of Heaven, who, we are told, are swift as wind, and volatile as fire, we are able to interpret the well-known dream of the Patriarch Jacob †, who beheld at Bethel, a visionary ladder, suspended from the skies,

* Tobit, xii. 13. compared with Rev. viii. 2, 3.

† As Jacob proceeded (Gen. xxxii.), the angels of God again met him, and he called the place Mahanaim; which signifies the encampment of an army, to denote the great number of celestial beings whom he saw.

and crowded with these celestial visitants, some alighting on the earth, and others returning to the courts of God. We can with the eye of humble faith, behold *the heavens opened; and the holy angels of God ascending and descending* on the disciples of *the Son of Man**.

V. This welcome report of the pure and upright behaviour of faithful sojourners upon earth, being circulated throughout the mansions of bliss, we cannot doubt that the glorified host of the happy will listen to it with complacency and delight;—that they will congratulate each other on the triumph of good;—on the prospect of an increase to their band;—on a new advancement of the glory of the Most High:—and that, seizing their harps with holy rapture, they will echo the voice of penitence to the eternal throne;—“circling it and singing,”—or convert the glad tidings of perseverance to a theme of praise. Worthy, will they say, art thou, O God, to be extolled with worship, and honour, and glory;—worthy is He by whom the worlds were made, to receive, from the creatures of his hands, and the objects of his love, an offering of all the faculties with which he hath endowed them. Or, again, made acquainted with the speedy termination of labour, which awaits those dis-

* John, i. 51.

ciples whose obedience has been the theme of their hymn, may we not conceive them making ready for each his assigned mansion; and, in whatever sense the scriptural metaphor may be understood, employing their hands among the bowers of immortality, in weaving *crowns of life* for such of their brethren, as shall be found faithful unto death? Nor let these suggestions be deemed the fictions of fancy, presuming too far into the heaven of heavens. We are acquainted, in plain and sober language, by that sacred volume which is truth itself, that the salvation of man, and his glory, are things, into which the angels desire to look*.—We are told by St. Paul, that they are most eloquent of tongue †.—We are told by a greater than St. Paul, that there is joy, in the presence of God, among the angels, over one sinner that repenteth ‡:—and surely it seems to follow, as a natural consequence, that this joy will be increased with every fresh act of obedience, which evinces repentance to be sincere.

VI. Yet further:—When the awful hour which awaits every child of Adam, the hour of dissolution, approaches;—when the body is severely racked by pain;—when the eye is about to close on those objects of fond affec-

* 1 Pet. i. 12. † 1 Cor. xiii. 1. ‡ Luke, xv. 10.

tion, of whom it cannot take leave with indifference, another interesting office of guardian spirits will consist in whispering words of peace to the departing followers of Jesus;—in removing the film and dimness from the sight of faith;—in rolling back to its view the curtain of the skies, and permitting it to descry those seats of boundless felicity where it will speedily be, and *where it will be as the angels**. Neither do I here speak the language of imagination when I describe these holy watchers, “a globe of lucid spirits,” as hovering over and smoothing the couch of death;—as attending to the last struggles,—and as ready to receive the soul of piety when it shall at length have been breathed away from the body;—to catch in their arms the spirit emancipated from its prison-house;—to bear the pure and immaterial existence along the way of heaven, and to deposit it in the place which the Saviour hath prepared for it. By the hands of two of these ministering beings, was rolled away the stone from the entrance of the holy tomb, that the Son of God might come forth from the dead. And in another place we read,—words still more appropriate,—*and it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom* †.

* Mark, xii. 25.

† Luke, xvi. 22.

VII. To the bosom of Abraham, said our Lord to the Jewish multitude:—to the bosom of a greater than Abraham would he have said unto us, to whom life and immortality have been brought more fully to light. Let us, therefore, lastly, accompany these benevolent guardians (for in closing our contemplations we shall thereby indulge, at least, a harmless,—I trust a sober,—I hope not an unprofitable view into futurity), while bearing their charge, and veiling themselves with their wings, they penetrate into the third heavens, and draw near to the presence of the Eternal*. As the spirit,—the approaching inmate of the everlasting mansions,—arises from sphere to sphere, passes between lessening systems and suns, and leaves at a distance that starry firmament, which it had formerly conceived to set limits to the universe, it is sustained by kindred spirits amidst the refulgence of encircling glories:—it is greeted by the voices of a countless multitude,—by radiant ranks of pure and beatified essences,—who receiving it amongst “their solemn troops and blessed societies;” and sing-

* The Chaldee paraphrase on Cant. iv. 12. speaking of the Garden of Eden, says,—that no man hath power of entering in but the pure, whose souls are carried thither by the hands of angels.—It is unnecessary here to enter into a disquisition respecting an intermediate state: sufficient, on the present occasion, is the belief that, on dissolution, the souls of the faithful pass into a place of happiness.

ing the song of its deliverance from sin and sorrow, ascribe the glory unto the Omnipotent who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world:—or, making mention of the returning emanation of Heaven, as an acquisition to their number, and the partaker of their felicity, invite it to join with them in the hymn of triumph—*Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory?*

Seeing, then, we are encompassed with these pure intelligences, these anxious witnesses of our conduct,—(and, I trust, I have said no more than Scripture warrants me in asserting)—let a lively sense of their presence afford a fresh inducement for avoiding, by divine grace, all those offences, which may give such honourable friends and protectors occasion to weep over our weakness, or to tremble for our safety*. Seeing it is our high privilege to come unto Mount Zion,—to the city of the living God,—to the Mediator of the New Covenant,—to God the judge of all,—and to an innumerable company of angels, among whom are, doubtless, the spirits of just men made perfect, let it be our chief care not to be wanting unto OURSELVES, lest by any means we forfeit so high a destiny, and fall short of so,

* 1 Cor. xi. 10.—1 Tim. v. 21.—Eccles. v. 6.—Ephes. iii. 10.

great a salvation. Let us pass our lives as becomes the candidates for admission into this happy, holy, and glorified society. Let us walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory* :—in a word, let our invisible associates give a tincture to our character; that when the Lord Jesus Christ shall once more be revealed from heaven, with all his mighty angels, the trumpet of resurrection may pour forth into our graves, sounds full of hope, and exultation, and triumph †; and that, returning with the Bridegroom to the bosom of his Father, we may sit down, as fellow-guests and friends, at the marriage-feast, with legions of holy and beatified spirits, in one eternal communion of pure felicity, and celestial concord.

* 1 Thessal. ii. 12.

† Matt. xxv. 31.—1 Thessal. iv. 16.

S E R M O N X I X .

THE SUCCESSION OF GENERATIONS *.

FOR A NEW YEAR.

ECCLESIASTES, CHAP. I. PART OF VERSE 4.

*One generation passeth away, and another
generation cometh.*

EVERY where around us, our eyes behold a scene of constant fluctuation and succession. Day and night,—summer and winter,—follow each other in faithful revolutions.—Each herb, each tree, whose seed is in itself, perishes in its course, and is replaced by the springing plant. The animal kingdom, in like manner, having lived throughout a few brief months or seasons, finish their work, deposit their eggs, produce their offspring, and die to give place to the rising tribes.

From a law thus general, man is not exempt. Race succeeds race, as wave pursues wave. We spring up to manhood;—we mingle in the busied throng;—but quickly, as if the crowd were too much swollen, we are pushed away along with

* I will take the liberty of recommending to readers of every age, a late publication, with its accompanying Dial;—entitled, “The Bioscope of Life.”

its superabundance, to the awful precipice of eternity. Meanwhile a new race arises about us on all sides;—and scarcely have we hailed the strangers into this existence, when we are compelled to withdraw, that we may leave it open to their exertions.—Such is the life and state of man.—One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh. Let us turn our meditations,—as at the present time is most suitable,—to the various lessons afforded by this picture of our condition: lessons which are no novelties, yet which require no apology. They are always represented; they are familiarly known: they are trite and common-place;—yet,—strange to tell,—they are continually gliding from remembrance; and let the fastidious yawn, or the scoffer condemn, they are therefore to be continually reiterated. *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which WE HAVE HEARD, lest at any time we should let them slip**.

I. *One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.* The words, in their natural order, direct us to a view of mankind, as distributed into TWO GREAT CLASSES;—the old, and the young;—the wise, and the inexperienced;—the grave, and the less considerate. To each, respectively, duties and sentiments belong;—nor, in some respects, ought either to encroach

* Heb. ii. 1.

on the character of the other. It is more especially fitting for the departing race to cherish and protract in their minds the consideration of their being quickly about to leave the present scene of things;—that it may prompt them to adapt their conduct to their condition, by banishing from their behaviour all that inordinate vivacity which belongs more properly to earlier life,—and by studying that sedate and venerable deportment, which is the suitable aspect of decline. Not, however, that age should assume severity; much less that it should sternly oppose the innocent hilarity of spirits naturally light and jocund in the opening season of existence. Like a calm evening, in which the sun departs divested of all his fiercer rays, let the passing generation retain their cheerfulness, while they lay aside all that ardour of gaiety, and that eager avidity in terrestrial pursuit, which characterize the season of hope and of enterprise. Impart, my fellow-disciples,—it, under the favour of that name, I may presume to dictate to your years,—impart to the advancing race, the knowledge you have attained,—the conclusions you have drawn. Teach them,—for well you are acquainted with the truth,—that it is only the fear of God, and an earnest obedience yielded to his will, that is capable of affording genuine satisfaction, and of bringing

a man peace at the last. Teach them—in what vanity and vexation of spirit all fond expectations of deriving felicity from the poor advantages and pleasures of this inferior scene have terminated. Teach them these things, that they may happily acquire their wisdom from your report and avowal, and not, as you perhaps have yourselves been instructed, through the rudiments of repentance.

As to the COMING generation, let them prepare themselves for discharging, with dignity and usefulness, the duties to which they are called. Let them not try, with saucy and impious petulance, to push their predecessors off the stage,—by contemning their admonitions, or making mockery of their antiquated manners. Far from judging with presumption what is good for themselves on earth, let them suspect their own imperfect views to be erroneous, and repose themselves with submission on the opinion of minds matured by longer and deeper observation of the world. Let them rest well assured that there is a winning modesty, as well as a just prudence, *in honouring and obeying parents,—in submission to governors, spiritual pastors, and masters.* Beware, ye whom these admonitions concern, of wasting your precious days of improvement, and of preparation for society, in the slumber of indo-

lence, or the mischief of sensual pleasure. Habituate your minds to view life as a whole, of which the various successive parts are dependant on one another. Happily, the world is yet all before you,—you are the race that cometh; and to-day you are in possession,—did you but recognise the advantage,—of a thousand golden enviable opportunities.—A little while, and you will be the generation that passeth away. As these opportunities are now improved or neglected,—so precisely will be the measure of future satisfaction or sorrow. If youth be dedicated to solid and useful application;—to duty towards God and man;—to early prayer to the Father of Spirits;—to the establishment of virtuous and serious habits; a foundation is laid for success in pursuit,—for independence of circumstances,—for respectability of character,—and, what is of far higher value than all these advantages,—for the favour of God,—for interest in the great propitiation, for reception of the succours of grace,—and for perpetual happiness in the world to come. Need I reverse this description, and paint before your view the dismal result of an early spring-time squandered away in negligent or dissipated courses?—Need I acquaint you, that a blot in the forming character cannot, in the eye of an unsparing world, be wiped away by

long years of atonement;—that evil habits once contracted, are not to be relinquished without efforts nearly miraculous;—that they who linger in their prime, must be condemned to see the diligent and the virtuous outstrip them in the course of life;—and that if God regards with peculiar favour the flower of the soul when it is presented to him in the bud; so, if the offering be delayed till it begin to WITHER,—even if it should, at that late hour, meet with acceptance, it will surely be crowned with less of his affection.

Could I lay bare the bleeding hearts of some, who may at this moment be placed on your right hand and on your left, doubt not, that you would behold them sighing a sad assent to the faithfulness of these representations.

II. But, besides these improvements of the words before us, to be respectively derived by persons of various ages,—a different body of lessons may be deduced from the same source, adapted to the common circumstances of old and young, considered collectively and promiscuously.

If every thing below be changeable and fleeting;—if that one generation goeth, and another

generation cometh, be a faithful representation of the present condition of the human race,—how can *any* cease to reflect, or to act as if they reflected,—that, as component parts of the race thus circumstanced, they are even *now partaking of this passing character?* Doubtless, even the youngest are comprehended in this description;—for though, in one sense, they are only entering into life,—in another, they are even now departing out of it,—and each advance made from infancy to manhood, is but a step down the declivity,—a nearer approach to the grave. There is no definite point of time marked out, as distinguishing one race of mortals from another: and our condition resembles those trees in warmer climates, on whose different branches blossoms are continually bursting into light, and fruit pending in maturity; but, whose blossoms often appear only to be destroyed, and whose fruit may be shaken down in the beginning of its formation. To many a one, the advancing infirmities of life; some diseased organ,—some fading part of the frame;—the silver lock appearing,—the sight, or the hearing, beginning to fail,—the limbs trembling under their accustomed burden,—speak in a language more eloquent than that of words,—Thy prime is past; thou art ready to drop to the earth;—the marks of incipient decay are found upon thee; the signs of

a PASSING generation are visible upon thy features. And even they whose complexions are yet ruddy with health, and whose bones are knit in robustness, need only go forth into the cemetery around us,—need only call to recollection the occurrences of the by-gone year, to learn that their tenure is hardly more secure. Have they not beheld individuals,—the resemblances of themselves,—surprised by accident, or crushed by disease, while blooming in all the fulness of florid aspect, and exulting in the glory of their strength? Thus, like the shadows of an optic lamp upon the wall, do manhood, and infancy, and old age,—all alike shadows,—appear in confusion, and vanish from the scene. Since all, therefore, are included under one and the same description,—all a generation passing,—hastening away,—to all must the moral be alike interesting and important. What real preparation are they making for their exit?—Doth the hand apply with all its might and diligence to the accomplishment of the work to be performed,—not suspended in the hope of an earthly future,—in the prospect and confident boast of a morrow,—of a future and a morrow which they never may behold?

III. From contemplating the picture of life delineated by the inspired preacher, let us next learn to impose a salutary *limitation*.

on earthly attachment and pursuit.—To be affectionately inclined towards our fellow-mortals, and particularly towards those with whom we are knit in the bonds of affinity;—to cultivate the delights of amity,—and to discharge the offices of kindness,—is a proper accomplishment of one of the chief purposes for which man was placed on earth, as well as a laudable participation of one of those stingless pleasures with which the Almighty hath graciously lightened his load of sorrow. It is, nevertheless, his wisdom to be admonished by the fluctuation of his species,—to beware of wrapping up his WHOLE happiness in objects so fleeting,—or of resting his full stay on so frail and feeble a support. If he embark *all* his fortunes on so slender a vessel, the wreck may speedily be total. Let the parent, the husband, the friend, be careful to moderate, by the sober corrective of religion, that excessive affection with which nature inclines to hang on the corresponding relations of life. Let their chief dependence be still fixed on possessions, higher, more immovable,—less the sport of accident, and less the prey of time. While the various tender relations of this existence are prized,—with strong indeed, but subordinate attachment,—let God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, ever occupy the chief place in their souls.—So will they secure one principal trea-

sure, which can neither be wasted, nor rifled, nor lost;—so likewise will they best prepare themselves for the shock of separation from their secondary and precarious joys; which, if rashly estimated as the sole or chief objects of reliance, might, when swept away with the passing generation, leave the minds of survivors in a state of solitude and sorrow, nearly too painful for nature to sustain.

Together with earthly attachments, *earthly pursuits* should know their bounds.—I do not mean to insinuate, that revelation at all prohibits that stretch of mind,—that grandeur of conception,—that anticipation of protracted labour, which plan, and patiently proceed to execute, undertakings requiring much pains and time for their accomplishment.—On these, however, the Christian will impose restraints.—First: he will regard his earthly schemes as subservient, more or less, to the great end of his being,—the glory of God; which, to a certain extent, if retained as the prime motive, is effected by utility towards man. Whatsoever his hand findeth to do,—he will remember this end,—that he may never do amiss*.—Secondly: he will not permit his projects of distant, but uncertain usefulness, to interfere with his ordinary duties, and with the

* Eccles. iii. 36.

beneficence immediately within his reach:—while pulling down his barns, and building larger, the sound will ring in his ears,—*Boast not thyself of the future; but now, while thou hast time, do good unto men**.—And thirdly; it will be his rule to plan and execute in entire submission to the Giver and Withdrawer of life and talent; ready to acquiesce without a murmur of regret, should he be summoned into eternity from any unfinished labour. *Go to, now, ye that say,—To-day, or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain;—whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow:—for that ye ought to say,—If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that†.*

In a word,—*He that selleth, let him be as he that fleeth away; and he that buyeth, as one that will lose; he that occupieth merchandise, as he that hath no profit by it; and he that buildeth, as he that shall not dwell therein; he that soweth, as though he should not reap; so also, he that planteth the vineyard, as he that shall not gather the grapes‡: for this night may their souls be required of them; and then whose shall these things be which they have provided§?*

* Gal. vi. 10.

† James, iv. 13, 14, 15.

‡ Esdras, xvi. 41, &c.

§ Luke, xii. 20.

IV. A lesson of *gratitude* may, at the present season in an especial manner, be derived from the passage on which we have at this time been meditating. While a part of the generation to which we belong has passed away, during the year which has now rolled over our heads,—it is *our* good fortune to be still preserved. Life, with all its sorrows, abounds in mercies,—and to desire its continuance is an instinct of nature. While many of our age have fallen at our right hand,—is it not just cause of thankfulness, that we continue under the sun,—to enjoy the smiles of the universe,—the treasures of knowledge,—and the sweets of friendship?—Or, if to beings destined for immortality, this protraction of life be deemed a gift of trivial value,—when viewed as merely a prolongation of earthly enjoyments,—how vast must its importance appear to all, if regarded as a continuance of the opportunities of salvation! How many, cut off during the last twelve months, in the full career of guilt, or of thoughtlessness,—hurried away, with all their unrepented sins upon their heads, to the tribunal of infinite justice and purity,—are now, perhaps, wailing in the dolorous regions of darkness, and wringing their hands in unavailing despair,—to think that no room is, in *THEIR* case, now left for penitence,—none for pardon; —that their accepted time will never more re-

turn,—and that the gracious days of the Son of Man are, with THEM, gone for ever! We too, my brethren, have been guilty of trespasses;—we too, like them, have had our unguarded moments, and our unthinking seasons;—and yet we are mercifully spared. Since the sun last repeated his annual course,—which of us has not offended, oftener than he can recollect, in thought, and word, and deed?—Some, it may be, have poised a deceitful balance;—some laid plans for the deliberate injury of their neighbour;—some cherished the evil conceptions of a depraved imagination.—To all this, the Sovereign of the universe was witness. His arm is powerful to destroy, as well as to save;—and with us, as with others, a period might have been put to existence, before repentance had succeeded to transgression. Merciful providence!—how would it have now fared with many!—what unheard-of pains and torments might they have been at this moment enduring, if death had received a mandate to execute his commission, while one was convulsed with a paroxysm of boisterous rage,—while the dark falsehood trembled on another's lips;—while the hand of a third was turning the secret key,—or stretched forth to obtain from the receiver of stolen property, an equivalent for his ill-gotten spoil! O you who are stung to the quick at this recital,—blame not the

boldness of him who may have pierced your feelings;—but, while the blood of conscious guiltiness mantles in your cheeks, bless God that it has not ceased to flow within your veins. It is yours to be still numbered with the generation that is going, but has not hitherto passed away.—To you the gates of mercy, through the Mediator, continue open.—In your ears the terms of the Gospel covenant are to-day sounded as aforesaid;—and the grace of God flows onward into your hearts, through all its accustomed channels. For such long-suffering,—such unmerited kindness,—does not a return of the liveliest gratitude seem owing? If, therefore, you will seek to render gratitude acceptable, see that it rest not in an inactive sentiment:—it is the property of lively faith to work by love; and thus, since the shadows of your night have not descended, let gratitude work by duty, while it is yet called day.

V. From the words which have at this time occupied our reflections, we may, in the last place, gather matter of *consolation*. Has any one present, during the years that are gone by, been bereft of objects of social affection, or of tender endearment?—Has a mournful vacancy been left in any domestic circle?—Has the friend, who in life loved better than a brother, closed his eyes on the light of the sun; become deaf to the voice of counsel,

and insensible to the sympathies of nature?—Receive, child of Adam, the blow with resignation;—for, behold, the event is conformable to the order of Providence. *One generation goeth away, and another generation cometh.* The world is appointed as a field of exercise and trial for many successive families of men. Did we possess this our earthly abode for ever, the globe would speedily be overstocked with its inhabitants, and no room would thus remain in it for the entrance of new candidates for immortality. To the end that multitudes of these might be accommodated, human life has wisely been made short in its duration.—A generation, —a race of individuals—arises;—enjoys a full and fair opportunity of accepting, or rejecting, the terms of salvation, as proposed by the Gospel of truth:—and then, after having made a good, or an ill use of its labouring-time, disappears to make way for the next great family of probationers. Let the widowed parent ponder on this reflection; and, looking around his table on his rising olive-plants, regard them as a supply,—for so they are in truth,—of the loss which nature is too prone to bewail with an excessive and unhallowed sorrow. When we behold mankind in constant fluctuation, and their generations coming or departing,—let us adore, instead of arraigning, the wisdom and the goodness of God,—since by this arrangement, He hath

prepared a theatre of action for incalculable numbers, who all come forward in such succession as never to throng the scene,—never to press or incommode each other. Think, that when you lost the partner of your bosom,—the friend of your confidence,—the child of your love,—a new being, in some part of the world, sprang up, and came forward into the vacant space, to contend for the crown of glory and immortality.—Can you, therefore, harbour the selfish desire to recall the dead in the Lord,—when you consider that you might thereby hinder from seeing the light,—that you might detain in the dark womb of insensibility,—the embryo of a human being,—capable of infinite improvement,—of glorifying God,—of benefiting man,—and of enjoying a pure and perpetual felicity?

And how evident the intimation of that future state of being, afforded by this rapid fluctuation and succession!—How fully are the shortness and uncertainty of life,—the dissolution of friendships,—the bleeding of hearts,—the calamities of families,—the bursting of the bands of tenderness, which are occasioned by the havoc and waste of death, reconciled by this solution to the Divine wisdom and goodness! Admit only life to be a prelude to eternity, and a field of discipline; and all the scen-

ing chance or severity which it exhibits, starts at once into the most admirable order. Generations are short-lived, because they are only in the infancy of existence; and one generation maketh way for another, that the many mansions of heaven may be peopled. *So I answered and said,—Couldst thou not make those that have been made, and that be now, and that are to come, AT ONCE;—that thou mightest show thy judgment the sooner? Then answered he me, and said,—The creature may not haste above the Maker; neither may the world hold them at once that shall be created therein*.*

Thus, to the unspeakable consolation of them that mourn, it appears, that when the individuals of the present generation pass away, in compliance with the wise laws of Providence, they do not drop into annihilation;—they are not lost for ever;—they die to live;—they go to be seen again. If they be truly worthy of our estimation and regret, they are gone to inherit those glorious abodes, where the good are blessed, and where God is in the midst of them, —where they have sate down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,—with Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs;—with all the faithful of all the generations that have ever lived; and, through the mercy of Heaven, if **WE** be true

* 3 Esdras, v. 43, 44.

unto OURSELVES, our doom of transition will convey us into that blessed association.

To what Power are we indebted for confirming the imperfect suggestions afforded in this matter by natural religion:—for chasing from the mind that torturing anxiety, which doubts while it surmises, and trembles while it hopes! Thanks, eternal thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath shed the full irradiation of certainty on the faint conjectures of human reason:—who hath illuminated the dark and fearful entrance of the tomb, and shown it to be but a porch unto the courts of life and immortality. Thanks be to Him who hath gotten the victory over death, and who, in atoning for transgression, hath rendered eternal life an object of serene forethought and ardent desire;—when, if this propitiation and reliance had been unknown, the prospect,—even if sanctioned by the word of truth,—would have been damped by despondence, and fraught with alarm.

Profiting by the full intelligence thus imparted to us, let us diligently seek an interest in the blessed Sacrifice, which strips this intelligence of all its terrors, and renders it consolatory and cheering;—that as soon as we shall have failed with the generation with which we are

passing away, we may be received into everlasting habitations. Let us elevate our affections to that high and cloudless clime, which abides for ever superior to all change;—which, as the summit of a mountain towers above the storms, —is wholly inaccessible to the vicissitudes experienced in this turbid and unstable valley of sorrows; that clime wherein all joys are permanent as they are pure;—where families of men shall no longer pass away;—where they who have attained, through faith and obedience, to a fruition of the beatific presence of God, shall dwell in the light of his countenance,—shall bask in the beams of his love,—shall admire and extol the wonders of his might, from generation to generation, and world without end,

S E R M O N XX.

THE CHAIN OF THE DOCTRINES.

A FAREWELL SERMON.

GALATIANS, CHAP. IV. VERSE 18.

But it is good to be zealously affected, always, in a good thing; and not only when I am present with you.

IF the father of a family, who had studied to train up his offspring in the faith and fear of God, were laid upon his death-bed, we might reasonably conceive it to be his wish, on that awful occasion, to sum up, under a few general heads, the various lessons and advices, which from time to time he had communicated, and to leave them, in one solemn concluding charge, to those, for whose happiness he feels an interest.

Nearly in the same manner, is it natural for a minister of the Gospel, who has for a considerable length of time instructed a congregation, to draw up, at the moment of his final separation from them, a brief abstract of the several instructions on which he had, in time

past, expatiated; and to stamp it, as a last impression, upon their minds.

The tie, my friends, which has for some years subsisted between us, is at length about to be dissolved. Although I have been with you, it is true, in much weakness*,—I trust I may, without presumption, call you all to witness this day, that,—whatever may have been my deficiencies in many respects,—I scrupled not, during my ministry, to declare to you, at different opportunities, the whole counsel of God†; and accordingly, I have now scarcely any other desire, than to recapitulate in your presence, the various leading branches of that counsel,—that you may perceive at one view,—and easily treasure in your minds, the compass and end of all religious instruction;—the great scheme of Christian salvation.

It will, indeed, prove no difficult undertaking, to comprise and illustrate, within narrow limits, the most important truths of our religion;—so well adapted are they, by their shortness, for the most occupied,—and, by their admirable simplicity, for the least intelligent minds. From exhibiting them in a concentrated and collected form, I propose and anticipate one material advantage;—I mean, your being convinced, that,

* 1 Cor. ii. 3.

† Acts, xx. 27.

instead of forming a miscellany of detached articles of belief, they compose, taken together, a consistent and beautiful system. While you thus learn to acknowledge these truths, as a series of progressive and connected propositions, your attention and interest, it may reasonably be hoped, will be more earnestly directed separately towards each of them.— You will rely more confidently on its divine sanction,—you will resolve to adhere to it with greater steadfastness; when you shall have discovered it to be a link which cannot be broken off, or injured, without essential detriment to the entire chain.

I. The great original principle,—as I have frequently intimated,—on which all the other doctrines of our venerable religion depend, is the fall of our first parents, and the consequent corruption of our nature. As soon as Adam, our common progenitor, fell, by eating of the forbidden fruit, his nature received a taint of evil, which has been communicated to the whole of his posterity. In proof of this principle, we learn from the New Testament, that—*by one man sin entered into the world; or, as it is differently expressed, —many were made sinners**. And that this word *many*, is synonymous with the whole human race,—old and young,—and whether deeply

* Rom. v. 12 and 19.

stained with crimes,—or comparatively exempt from actual transgressions, is manifest from the declaration which assures us that the *Scriptures* hath concluded *ALL* under *sin**; and that *there is none righteous; no, not one.*

The testimony of Scripture on this head is confirmed by every one's acquaintance with the secrets of his own heart, and knowledge of human nature. Every individual, even the purest, and the most upright,—finds a law of the members warring against the law of the mind;—a law often triumphing over clear convictions, and earnest resolutions;—a law of which, as his intercourse with mankind increases, he observes more and more of the universal operation. By reason then of this inherent depravity, we come into the world exposed to the Divine displeasure;—or, in different terms, and in the language of the sacred writings,—*we are, by nature, the children of wrath* †.

It is next to be observed, that this root of corruption has, more or less, in the life of every individual who has passed the season of infancy, sprung up into a variety of wilful transgressions, in thought, word, and deed. The principle of evil,—the latent propensity itself,—is known among divines by the name of ORIGINAL

* Gal. iii. 22.

† Eph. ii. 3.

SIN;—while the deliberate offences into which it has led us, are, for the sake of distinction, termed ACTUAL SINS. Now, if even our original taint of evil render us objects of displeasure to a God of immaculate purity, our actual transgressions must have, in a still greater degree, *provoked his just wrath and indignation against us.*

II. Thus circumstanced,—guilty in every way before Heaven, and menaced with deserved punishment,—whither shall the human race flee for relief?—On what stay shall they rest their hopes of salvation? No services,—no offerings which they can themselves present, are of any avail in averting their impending doom.—Shall they bring to the Almighty gifts of their possessions? All these possessions,—even the cattle on a thousand hills,—are theirs only in trust;—are already his own.—Shall they go before his presence with the purer tribute of prayer, issuing from a heart, penitent for the past, and resolute as to the future?—But who has acquainted them that prayer and contrition will, OF THEMSELVES, blot out guilt already contracted, or disarm the anger, and ward off the punishment, which that guilt has justly incurred? Or, admitting for a moment, that past transgressions will be cancelled by unerring obedience in time to come,—an efficacy,

however, which there is no shadow of sanction for really ascribing to it on its own account,—can they further flatter themselves, that such unerring obedience is in their power? To these questions, I presume, there needs no reply. Consequently, if the race of Adam, thus sinful, and thus frail, look at all for acceptance in the sight of Heaven, they must repose their hopes of it on some propitiation, foreign to their own exertions. And here you will perceive the intimate connexion betwixt the first elementary principle of our religion,—the degeneracy of nature, arising from the fall, coupled with its actual evil consequences, and the next great article of Christian belief;—the redemption of a ruined world. When bruised by our spiritual adversary, we look, and there is none to help:—behold a heavenly hand which getteth us the victory. The propitiation of which we are in quest, our Bible acquaints us, is the sacrifice offered in the person of our Lord and Saviour; the great atonement for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual*. In order to admit the doctrine of UNIVERSAL redemption, we must naturally presuppose an UNIVERSAL fall:—a fall, which though greatly aggravated in the children of Adam by their own actual transgressions, is nevertheless altogether independent of those

* 1 John, ii. 2.

transgressions;—for the infant who sees the light for a few hours, and expires, has certainly committed no actual transgression;—yet, by the very term, it is included in the universal fall, and if eternally happy, is happy, not by any personal guiltlessness,—but by a participation of the benefits of redemption. How otherwise could that redemption be pronounced universal?—How could Christ be said to have died for ALL mankind? Thus closely and indissolubly connected are the two doctrines of the depravity and ruin of mankind, as the sinful descendants of a sinful ancestor, and of their recovery by the merits of Christ, the second Adam;—a ruin and a recovery correlative and co-extensive. Therefore, *as by the offence of one, judgment came upon ALL men unto condemnation;—on the whole human race;—even so, by the righteousness of one, the free gift came unto ALL men, to justification of life**.

III. Although, however, agreeably to these words of the holy Apostle, redemption be a free gift, its efficacy in saving each individual depends, by Divine appointment, on his performance of a certain condition. This condition is, in one word, that of faith;—faith, or belief in the revealed will of God; but more especially, in the merits of the crucified Saviour.

* Rom. v. 18.

Without faith, St. Paul acquaints us, it is impossible to please God : while in another Epistle he points out the chief object on which the faith of saved transgressors must repose itself:—Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ †.*

The Scriptures, however,—and it is of the utmost importance that we should here particularly attend to their information,—present to our notice two descriptions of faith,—on one of which no solid reliance can be placed. This is a dead, or a barren faith;—a faith which bringeth not forth works of righteousness;—a simple assent to the truths of religion, by which *the devils also believe and tremble ‡.* The right, or that which is called a saving faith, is a lively faith,—a faith which worketh by love, or, of which the sincerity is manifested by that holiness of living which it suggests, in the same manner as a healthy tree is known and valued by the full production of its proper fruits§. I will here take the liberty of hinting, that, as illustrative of these remarks, the whole of the Epistle General of St. James is highly worthy of your attentive perusal.

IV. But, fourthly; In what manner must our works of holiness, of which the necessity is

* Heb. xi. 6.

‡ James, ii. 19.

† Rom. v. 1.

§ Gal. v. 6.

thus obvious, as tests of faith, be performed? Man is so very far gone from original righteousness (Art. IX.), that he cannot of his own natural strength perform works acceptable to God. (Art. X.): *We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves* *: for *in us dwelleth no good thing* †. Our sufficiency therefore is, and can be, only of Almighty God: and thus are we naturally introduced to the contemplation of a new branch of revealed religion,—the great and essential doctrine of Divine Grace. The concluding words of the Tenth Article of our Church,—namely,—*The grace of God, by Christ, must prevent, or go before us, that we may have a good will to works of obedience, and work WITH us, when we HAVE that good will*, appear to be a paraphrase on the address of St. Paul to the Philippians: *For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure* ‡. Yet let us not hence take occasion to imagine that we ourselves are permitted to rest passive and supine, entirely dispensed from making any exertion in duty: much less, that we derive a privilege from the help that is promised and offered, to continue in sin, that grace may abound. God forbid that any of us should for a moment lend an ear to suggestions so fallacious and fatal! Man is placed on earth in a state of trial; and although undoubtedly

* 2 Cor. iii. 5. † Rom. vii. 18. ‡ Phil. ii. 13.

he could by no means obtain salvation unless the grace of God's Holy Spirit were held out to him;—he possesses, nevertheless, a power of ruining himself, by refusing to lay hold of this extended aid.—He can *quench the Spirit*,—he can *grieve the Spirit*,—he can refuse to open the door of his heart, when the Spirit stands without and demands admission*. Our obedience then consists in seeking the grace of God; and in accepting it, by availing ourselves of its influences when they are tendered. And they are tendered,—as I have ever taught, and as I ever must believe,—to all men, and, more or less, at all times. *I will pour out my Spirit upon ALL flesh* †. *To-day, if ye will hear his voice* (to-day then, and every day, his voice may be heard), *harden not your hearts* ‡. Seeing then, that, as far as our voluntary agency extends, we may thus accept or reject the grace of God;—and seeing that in our power of choice consists our probationary trial;—in our determination,—our holiness or our guilt;—*let us come boldly and continually to the throne of God, that we may obtain grace to help in time of need* §; and at the same time, let us labour, in obedience to that holy impulse and guidance, to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling* ||. It is mani-

* 1 Thes. v. 19.—Eph. iv. 30.—Rev. iii. 20.

† Joel, ii. 28.

‡ Psalm xciv. 8.

§ Heb. iv. 16.

|| Phil. ii. 12.

fest indeed, that this belief in a co-operation of the agency of God with our own free acceptance of it, in the production of good and acceptable services, is the only belief capable of being reconciled to our rational views respecting the Divine attributes, and more particularly to the address of the Apostle to the Romans;—*The Spirit also bearing witness with your spirits, that ye are the children of God**.

Observe now, I entreat you, how intimately this doctrine of divine grace is connected with the first great principle of the Christian faith,—the original corruption of our nature. Were we naturally prone to good, we should stand in no need of assistance. The doctrine of grace supposes, on the contrary, that we are all, by nature, predisposed, in many respects, to evil;—that good, with us, is labouring against a stream;—and that consequently our own unassisted efforts are far too feeble, in INCLINATION, as well as in power, to struggle successfully with the current. And this is, in truth, taken continually for granted in every supplication for spiritual blessings which we present:—for why should we entreat God *not to lead us into temptation, but to deliver us from evil*, unless on the supposition, that, if abandoned to ourselves, we should most inevitably FALL into temptation,

* Rom. viii. 16.

and being tempted, that, in like manner, we should be incompetent to our own deliverance? The two Sacraments are reconciled to our reason, solely as arising out of the connexion betwixt the same doctrines. Baptism places us in a way of obtaining, and the Supper of the Lord continually supplies, that heavenly help, which is necessary to enable us to oppose the original corruption of our nature*.

V. The last great and distinguishing doctrine of Christianity, is that of a Trinity in Unity:—and this too can, without difficulty, be at once expounded by a reference to the sacred volume, and shown to be very closely connected with all the other leading articles of belief. That the Father and the Son are one, is explicitly declared by the Apostle John, where he introduces our Lord saying to his followers, —*He that seeth me, seeth Him that sent me* †.— Again, our Saviour is described, in direct terms; as *Christ, who is over all, God, blessed for ever* ‡.

* The effect of Baptism is to remove the liability to punishment for original sin, and to supply the grace which may prevent, in a great measure, its springing up in actual offences; —but not entirely to take away the taint, the bias to evil, which is justly said in the ninth Article to remain, even in those who are regenerated.—Rom. vii. 18.

† John, xii. 45.

‡ Rom. ix. 5.

With respect to the unity of the Father and the Holy Spirit, let it suffice to establish that article of belief, by the selection of a single passage from amongst many that might be cited,—*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you *?*

Now, if we are convinced of the strict necessity of an atonement, different from our own offerings or penitent services, we must allow, that the more valuable that atonement is, the more likely will it prove to appease the Almighty Sovereign;—the greater assurance shall we undoubtedly feel, that it has really been SUFFICIENT to appease him, and to purchase our full pardon. What atonement then can be more valuable,—what more efficacious, than that which the sacred oracles have presented to our faith? When we are taught that a great Being, at once God and man, has divested himself of his glory, and suffered on our account,—when this august Being himself, in his divine character, hath assured us of the efficacy of his passion, we feel a stronger con-

* 1 Cor. iii. 16.

The space allowed being too limited to admit of an ampler elucidation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity in general, I must rest satisfied with referring to the work of Mr. Jones on the subject, where the proofs are fully unfolded.—The title of that work is, “*Jones’s Scriptural Doctrine of the Trinity.*”

fidence in the vicarial sacrifice, than if a subordinate agent,—if, for example, one of the angels, chargeable as they themselves all are with folly, were described and held forth to belief as our propitiation. When, placing on one hand, the heinousness of our transgressions, and on the other the strict justice and immaculate purity of the Governor, whose laws we have so presumptuously and repeatedly violated, we perceive and acknowledge, as we cannot but do, the extreme difficulty of reconciling him to his sinful creatures;—more ease must evidently be derived to the mind, from reflecting, that the Intercessor and the offended Power are one and the same;—that the Son is equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, than if we had learned to conceive the offended Power to be divine, and the Intercessor only an inferior and created being.

In the same manner, since we are unable to repent, and to turn unto God, by our own natural inclination and strength, it is, beyond all question, the most valuable—the most satisfactory information we can receive, to be told, that the supplemental strength which we require is furnished, not by any subordinate being, who, created like ourselves, might be supposed, like ourselves, to stand in NEED of

assistance, rather than to be capable of imparting it,—but by the third Person of a coequal Trinity,—by God the Holy Ghost.

Thus, my brethren, have I endeavoured to show, that the grand doctrines,—the various leading and essential points of Christianity,—have all an intimate mutual reliance and correspondence: and more particularly, that the corruption of human nature, by the fall of Adam, our great progenitor, is the first principle in which they all originate. In strict conformity with reason, indeed, there is no possibility of taking any one of these doctrines separately from the rest. They stand or fall together. Reject the first principle, and the others appear superfluous. Admit the first, or any one of these doctrines, and all the rest will easily follow as deductions from it.

It is no wonder then, that the disciples of Socinus, in denying the first of these articles of belief, deny the whole. They act, in this respect, with the strictest consistency. If man be not fallen, if he be not prone to evil, it is not impossible that some few of the race at least, might yield a full obedience to the laws of God: and under this supposition, it would likewise follow, that the death of infancy would be the death of innocence. On such

an hypothesis, then, it is abundantly plain, that there would be no indispensable necessity for Christ, as an UNIVERSAL SAVIOUR. Still less occasion would there appear for a sanctifying Spirit, and less power of accounting for a Trinity in Unity:—and although, on sufficient authority, we might assent to these doctrines, our belief in them would lose the sanction and support of apparent necessity, and satisfied reason. The whole which men required, under so contracted a view, was simply a pure and perfect system of morals, enforced by the assurance of future rewards and punishments.—Such wants, the instructions, and the well-attested resurrection of a man, like themselves, having had no pre-existence,—no divine nature,—would have been quite competent to supply:—and accordingly we know, that in these instructions, and in this fact, is comprised the whole of the Christian Revelation, agreeably to the Socinian creed.—The necessity, then, of being steadfast in maintaining all these truths, without any one exception, or relaxation, as forming a great and regular system, will now, I trust, be obvious to every mind. On many inferior topics of religious difference, such as forms and ceremonies, and the observance of days, it is far better, I conceive, to preserve Christian charity, than very strenuously and warmly to con-

tend: since two individuals may hold opposite sentiments respecting them, while both stand equally high in the favour of Heaven.— Yet, although it be proper, even on the most momentous occasions, to avoid, as much as lieth in us, the animosities of controversy, our faith, in all these leading propositions, which we perceive are the life and blood of our holy religion, ought never, on any account, to waver;—our zeal in recommending them, on proper occasions, to others, should at no time suffer abatement;—our earnestness, our pertinacity, in refusing to recede from maintaining their strict indispensable necessity, must never, never for a moment be accommodated to the maxims and manners of a false politeness. Let it be remembered, however,—at all times faithfully remembered,—that a belief in these doctrines, and a steadfast adherence to them, is chiefly enjoined, and almost solely valuable, as the occasion of improvement in personal holiness. When rightly understood, indeed, the great truths of Christianity will be perceived to have, all of them, this direct tendency. For as soon as we discover the aversion of God from sin to have been so exceedingly great, as to render it needful that all the powers of Heaven should exert themselves, and work together in appeasing his displeasure, we cannot but infer our strict obligation, now that we

find ourselves happily delivered, to dread, above all things, a repetition, an aggravation of the offence;—to beware of crucifying the Son of God afresh by our sins* ;—or of grieving that holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption †. Rescued by so mighty an hand from destruction, and permitted to taste of the powers of the world to come,—can we fail to discern the imminent danger of relapsing, and to warn our own souls, even were Revelation silent on this head, that if any man draw back, he draws back into perdition ‡:—that if, when his house is swept and garnished, he go and take unto him seven other wicked spirits, the last state of that man is worse than the first §? In a word, the great doctrines, when received in an honest heart, must be acknowledged to have been imparted, not to foster inactivity, but to banish despair, and to encourage exertion;—not to state or suggest, that God has done every thing, and that we need do nothing for our salvation;—but to invite our souls to co-operate with the Almighty;—to acquaint us, blessed and animating truth! that if we do what we can to obey the divine laws, our feebleness will be assisted;—our errors forgiven;—and, O sublime mystery! assisted and forgiven by the

* Heb. vi. 6.

† Ephes. iv. 30.

‡ Heb. x. 39.

§ Matt. xii. 44, 45.

highest Powers of the universe, who are capable of assisting and forgiving.—And what more powerful enforcement can be added to the exhortation,—*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,*—than the accompanying argument,—*Forasmuch as ye know, that through the sufferings of the Saviour, your labour is not in vain in the Lord?*—What call to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling can be imagined more cheering,—what more effectual, than that which opens to us the pleasing prospect of success, in the assurance that God, through the influences of his Spirit, is working in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*?

When I now call to mind the manner in which, for several years, I have endeavoured, in explaining this chain of doctrines, to recommend the grand result, the duties which proceed from them, I feel deeply conscious of the necessity I am under, of soliciting forgiveness from Heaven and from you, for many omissions, and much imperfection. So far, then, as, in time past, I may have neglected any department of the duty of public instruction, I can only make a reparation, at this close of my ministry, by praying that your own understanding and good principles, aided by the

* Phil. ii. 13.

exertions of your other ministers, may be enabled to remedy that defect. So far as I may be candidly admitted, on the other hand, to have conscientiously and comprehensively discharged this duty, I trust that the grace of God may give efficacy to my labours, and long preserve any salutary impressions which it may have made, through my instrumentality, upon your minds. And as, agreeably to the principles which you have now heard unfolded, it is needful, to the production of this happy effect, that you should yourselves work together with that holy Agent, I must further express an earnest wish, that you will not be wanting in your portion of the labour. To aid your co-operation with the Spirit of grace and truth, permit me, on taking leave of you, to recommend to your most serious perusal the excellent works of LAW on a devout life; of MASON on self-knowledge; of MURRAY on the influence of religion on the mind; of TAYLOR on holy living and dying; and, as discourses for family or private reading, the three volumes of selected sermons for the Sundays and festivals of the church; the family sermons printed in the Christian Observer; together with the anonymous volume of "Discourses on the Doctrines and Duties of Christianity." For the furtherance of the same object, it is necessary to inculcate a moderate and cautious use of common amuse-

ments; and a strict attention to the sacred and profitable exercises of public, family, and private devotion. I would likewise entreat you to acquaint yourselves with the pleasure,—you will find it one of the highest which religion or the world affords, of attending to the spiritual necessities of the ignorant; and in an especial manner, of the young, among the inferior classes. To devise and promote measures for accommodating the poor, in churches and chapels of the Establishment; and to distribute amongst them, in their houses, Bibles, Prayer-books, Companions to the Altar, and different well-chosen religious tracts, are employments, not only useful and kind in themselves, but well calculated to keep alive your own religious feelings, and that, be assured, in a most pleasing manner, betwixt one Sabbath,—one occasion of public devotion, and another. An attention, however, to charity-schools, and more particularly to schools of industry and Sunday-schools, is what I am here anxious chiefly to recommend as a necessary duty; as well as an occupation at once useful and benevolent,—self-edifying and delightful. A selection from the excellent Reports of the Society for bettering the Condition of the Poor, together with two small volumes, entitled, “The Economy of Charity,”

and written by a highly respectable lady *, will greatly assist your zealous efforts in prosecuting this agreeable and philanthropic undertaking.

My remaining admonition on this head, is one of far greater importance than many may, at first view, be apt to imagine. It is a fault, unfortunately too common, amongst those, who, by reason principally of their local situation, bring to the house of instruction refined tastes, and minds tinctured with a propensity to luxury, to be more ready, in those complimentary thanks, which they occasionally pay, to their spiritual teachers, to signify their approbation of that which gratifies the fancy, than of that which amends the heart;—of striking novelties, brilliant figures, pathetic movements, than of the plain word of truth, preached in simplicity and sincerity. Now, as ministers are but men, it is necessary to recollect, that every such expression of misplaced approbation must have a strong tendency to debauch their minds; and to occasion their repetition of a culpable neglect of serious exhortation, and of evangelical truth, for the

* Mrs. Trimmer,—who has lately gone to receive the reward of her labours; and the soundness of whose judgment was not inferior to the fervency of her piety, and the earnestness of her zeal,

sake of that frivolous mode of instruction, which they find to be a surer way to the affections of their respective hearers. I would therefore most earnestly beseech you to beware, at all times, and in all places, of complimenting discourses of this latter description, however great may be their excellencies, and however highly they may have gratified you, when considered as works of taste. The distinguishing merit of a sermon is, undoubtedly, to illustrate the awful and distinguishing truths of Revelation, and to produce a serious and a permanent impression:—let this consideration be ever present to your minds; and so far as the individuals who sit to be judged, cannot wholly avoid pronouncing judgment, establish it as the fixed criterion and standard of your decision.—If you were studiously to confine the tribute of your commendation to discourses possessing these two merits;—nay, if you were invariably to make a rule of offering it, even when such discourses are destitute of every beauty of composition, and every grace of elocution, you would at once teach your pastors a salutary lesson, and provide for, at least, the doctrinal and preceptive excellence of the instructions, which you should, in future, receive.

We, who are stewards of the mysteries of God, find much occasion to tremble under our

charge;—to smite upon our bosoms, and anxiously to exclaim, Who is sufficient for these things? and the very best among us have to lament the very defective and unworthy manner in which we have performed our momentous duties. Conscious of infirmities, and sinking under apprehensions, it is not unnatural then that we should look abroad for every prop, to our hopes of being included amongst the ransomed of Christ;—that we should cling to the promise held forth in Scripture unto those who shall have turned others to righteousness, as offering some small abatement of our personal unworthiness to partake of the mighty propitiation and deliverance, which our own hand could never have accomplished. If, then, any reliance may, without presumption, be placed by a Christian pastor on such a soothing prospect, you need not wonder at the earnestness, alas!—it is a selfish zeal, with which I now conjure you to *stand fast in the Lord, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation**. In thus addressing you, I but speak for myself: I speak, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ,—that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain;—*for what is our hope, our joy, our crown of rejoicing? are not even*

* Phil. ii. 15.

*ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ?—
ye are our glory and joy*.*

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified †. I trust you will believe that I speak with that entire sincerity which I have at all times carried into the place of instruction, when I do assure you it is not without extreme pain and reluctance that I now resign my charge;—and that while I submissively yield to, I sincerely lament, the unavoidable circumstances of bodily and mental indisposition, which remove me from the situation of guide to a people, whose general piety, and plain, uncorrupted manners, present a field of contemplation on which the eye loves to relieve itself, after having witnessed those vicious morals, and those more artificial modes of life, which prevail in their immediate neighbourhood.

For the attention and respect, far greater than I have merited, which, since my entrance on the cure down to the present moment, I have experienced from you, my friends, as a congregation, accept my sincerest thanks.—There are some to whom I owe particular

* 1 Thess. ii. 19.

† Acts, xx. 32.

obligations, and whose friendship will be remembered by me, wherever I shall be cast.—There are some for whom an esteem is mingled with each drop of my blood, and must continue until that shall cease to circulate. Nor can I avoid the selfishness of expressing my hope, that I shall not be altogether blotted from their remembrance;—at least, that if ever any of those public instructions, from which they may have derived benefit, shall prompt them to a kind office, or to an effort of self-denial, they will put up a passing prayer for the salvation of one whose heart's desire for them is, as it ever was and will be, that they shall be saved *;—who will not forget to solicit Heaven for them in return;—and who anxiously looks for a renewal of their amity in a more exalted and permanent state, if it should chance to be denied in the present doubtful scene of severed friendships and precarious enjoyments.

The assurance delivered by our Saviour to his Apostles,—*Where I am, there ye shall be also*;—his address to the penitent malefactor upon the cross,—*Verily, this night thou shalt be with me in Paradise*,—and several other passages in the sacred writings, encourage us to indulge the blessed and pleasing hope, that in a future state of existence we shall be what

* Rom. x. 11. '

we have been, and know one another:—and that from the hymns and hosannahs which swell along the arch of heaven,—from the eternal adoration and gratitude, which, prostrate before the throne of God, it will be our duty, and unspeakable delight, to offer, some intervals will be graciously allowed to our affections, for reuniting the ties, which we had drawn together in this lower world. When, therefore, amidst the glories and pleasures of eternity, the parent shall clasp his long-lost child;—when brethren shall once more dwell together in unity;—when the new-embodied soul of every friend will rush forth to seek its partner spirit, some inferior satisfaction, it may humbly be expected, will be derived from that re-established intercourse of respect and attachment, which had subsisted betwixt faithful pastors and their flocks.

Finally;—Brethren, farewell;—for I can best bear to speak that word, when pondering on such reflections. There is much more that I would say to you; but just now I am unable: nor is it fitting that I should trespass longer upon your time.—In one word, then, if there be any amongst you, my kind and good hearers, who delight to entertain these consolatory and refreshing anticipations, see that, by a life of Christian faith and holiness, you

assure yourselves of your great recompense of reward. May the grace of God be ever with you. May his favour and blessing attend you and yours. In my last moment, and with my latest words in this place, let me express my sincere and ardent wishes for the success of your earthly and spiritual concerns. To hear of your happiness, will ever increase mine. To hear of your perseverance in the paths of life, will give me comfort in sickness, in distress, in old age;—will gladden my departing hour, and enable me (if it be allowable to speak thus of any thing earthly) to hope for forgiveness and favour at the tribunal of my Redeemer and Judge.—Farewell. Be perfect:—be of good comfort:—be of one mind:—live in peace:—and may the God of love and peace be with you. Amen.

THE END.

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